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AN  
EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

WHEREIN  
EACH CHAPTER IS SUMMED UP IN ITS CONTENTS: THE SACRED TEXT INSERTED AT LARGE  
IN DISTINCT PARAGRAPHS; EACH PARAGRAPH REDUCED TO ITS PROPER  
HEADS: THE SENSE GIVEN, AND LARGELY ILLUSTRATED:

WITH  
PRACTICAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS.

BY  
MATTHEW HENRY,  
LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

A NEW EDITION, CAREFULLY REVISED AND CORRECTED.  
IN NINE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.—JOSHUA TO 1 KINGS.

LONDON:  
JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

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## ORIGINAL PREFACE TO VOL. II.

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THIS second volume of methodized and practical expositions of the inspired writings ventures abroad with fear and trembling in the same plain and homely dress with the former on the Pentateuch. *Ornari res ipsa negat; contenta doceri—the subject requires no ornament; to have it apprehended is all.* But I trust, through grace, it proceeds from the same honest design to promote the knowledge of the scripture, in order to the reforming of men's hearts and lives. If I may but be instrumental to make my readers wise and good, wiser and better, more watchful against sin and more careful of their duty both to God and man, and, in order thereto, more in love with the word and law of God, I have all I desire, all I aim at. *May he that ministereth seed to the sower multiply the seed sown, by increasing the fruits of our righteousness,* 2 Cor. ix. 10. It is the history of the Jewish church and nation that fills this volume, from their first settlement in the promised land, after their 430 years' bondage in Egypt and their forty years' wandering in the wilderness, to their re-settlement there after their seventy years' captivity in Babylon—from Joshua to Nehemiah. The five books of Moses were taken up more with their laws, institutes, and charters; but all these books are purely historical, and in this way of writing a great deal of very valuable learning and wisdom has been conveyed from one generation to another. The chronology of this history, and the ascertaining of the times when the several events contained in it happened, would very much illustrate the history, and add to the brightness of it; it is therefore well worthy the search of the curious and ingenious, and they may find both pleasure and profit in perusing the labours of many learned men who have directed their studies that way. I confess I could willingly have entertained myself and reader, in this preface, with a calculation of the times through which this history passes; but I consider that such a babe in knowledge as I am could not pretend either to add to or correct what has been done by so many great writers, much less to decide the controversies that have been agitated among them. I had indeed some thoughts of consulting my worthy and ever-honoured friend Mr. Tallents of Shrewsbury, the learned author of the "View of Universal History," and of begging some advice and assistance from him in methodizing the contents of this history; but, in the very week in which I put my last hand to this part, it pleased God to put an end to his useful life (and useful it was to the last) and to call him to his rest, in the eighty-ninth year of his age: so that purpose was broken off, that thought of my heart. But that elaborate performance of his commonly called his "Chronological Tables" gives great light to this, as indeed to all other parts of history. And Dr. Lightfoot's "Chronology of the Old Testament," and Mr. Cradock's "History of the Old Testament Methodized," may also be of great use to such readers as I write for. As to the particular chronological difficulties which occur in the thread of this history, I have not been large upon them, because many times I could not satisfy myself, and how then could I satisfy my reader concerning them? I have not indeed met with any difficulties so great but that solutions might be given of them sufficient to silence the atheists and antiscripturists, and roll away from the sacred records all the reproach of contradiction and inconsistency with themselves; for, to do that, it is enough to show that the difference may be accommodated either this way or that, when at the same time one cannot satisfy one's self which way is the right. But it is well that these are things about which we may very safely and very comfortably be ignorant and unresolved. What concerns our salvation is plain enough, and we need not perplex ourselves about the niceties of chronology, genealogy, or chorography. At least my undertaking leads me not into those labyrinths. What is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*, is what I intend to observe, and I would endeavour to open what is dark and hard to be understood only in order to that. Every author must be taken in his way of writing; the sacred penmen, as they have not left us formal systems, so they have not left us formal annals, but useful narratives of things proper for our direction in the way of duty, which some great judges of common writers have thought to be the most pleasant and profitable histories, and most likely to answer the end. The word of God *manifestis pascit, obscuris exercet* (Aug. in Job Tract. 45), as one of the ancients expresses it, that is, *it has enough in it that is easy to nourish the meanest to life eternal, yet enough that is difficult to try the industry and humility of the greatest*. There are several things which should recommend this part of sacred writ to our diligent and constant search.

I. That it is *history*, and therefore entertaining and very pleasant, edifying and very serviceable to the conduct of human life. It gratifies the inquisitive with the knowledge of that which the most intense speculation could not discover any other way. By a retirement into ourselves, and a serious contemplation of the objects we are surrounded with, close reasoning may advance many excellent truths without being beholden to any other. But for the knowledge of past events we are entirely indebted (and must be so) to the reports and records of others. A notion or hypothesis of a man's own framing may gain him the reputation of a wit, but a history of a man's own framing will lay him under the reproach of a cheat any further than as it respects that which he himself is an eye or ear-witness of. How much are we indebted then to the divine wisdom and goodness for these writings, which have made things so long since past as familiar to us as any of the occurrences of the age and place we live in! History is so edifying that parables and apologies have been invented to make up the deficiencies of it for our instruction concerning good and evil; and, whatever may be said of other history, we are sure that in this history there is no matter of fact recorded but what has its use and will help either to expound God's providence or guide man's prudence.

II. That it is *true history*, and what we may rely upon the credit of, and need not fear being deceived in. That which the heathens reckoned *tempus ædælon* (which they knew nothing at all of) and *tempus μυθικόν* (the account of which was wholly fabulous) is to us *tempus ιστορικόν*, what we have a most authentic account of. The Greeks were with them the most celebrated historians, and yet their successors in learning and dominion, the Romans, put them into no good name for their credibility, witness that of the poet: *Et quequid Græcia mendax audet in historia—All that lying Greece has dared to record*, Juv. Sat. 10. But the history which we have before us is of undoubted certainty, and no cunningly devised fable. To be well assured of this is a great satisfaction, especially since we meet with so many things in it truly miraculous, and many more great and marvellous.

III. That it is *ancient history*, far more ancient than was ever pretended to come from any other hand. Homer, the most ancient genuine heathen writer now entirely extant, is reckoned to have lived at the beginning of the Olympiads, near the time when it is computed that the city of Rome was founded by Romulus, which was but about the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah. And his writings pretend not to be historical, but poetical fiction all over: rhapsodies indeed they are, and the very Alcoran of paganism. The most ancient authentic historians now extant are Herodotus and Thucydides, who were contemporaries with the latest of our historians, Ezra and Nehemiah, and could not write with any certainty of events much before their own time. The obscurity, deficiency, and uncertainty of all ancient history, except that which we find in the scripture, is abundantly made out by the learned bishop Stillingfleet, in that most useful book, his *Origines Sacræ*, lib. i. Let the antiquity of this history not only recommend it to the curious, but recommend to us all that way of religion it directs us in, as the good old way, in which if we walk we shall find rest for our souls, Jer. vi. 16.

IV. That it is *church history*, the history of the Jewish church, that sacred society, incorporated for religion, and the custody of the oracles and ordinances of God, by a charter under the broad seal of heaven, a covenant confirmed by miracles. Many great and mighty nations there were at this time in the world, celebrated it is likely for wisdom, and learning, and valour, illustrious men and illustrious actions; yet the records of them are all lost, either in silence or fables, while that little inconsiderable people of the Jews that dwelt alone, and was not reckoned among the nations (Num. xxiii. 9), makes so great a figure in the best known, most ancient, and most lasting of all histories; and no notice is taken in it of the affairs of other nations, except only as they fall in with the affairs of the Jews: *for the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance*, Deut. xxxii. 8, 9. Such a concern has God for his church in every age, and so dear have its interests been to him. Let them therefore be so to us, that we may be *followers of him as dear children*.

V. That it is a *divine history*, given by inspiration of God, and a part of that blessed book which is to be the standing rule of our faith and practice. And we are not to think it a part of it which might have been spared, or which we may now pass over or cast a careless eye upon, as if it were indifferent whether we read it or no; but we are to read it as a sacred record, preserved for our benefit on whom the ends of the world have come. 1. This history is of great use for the understanding of some parts of the Old Testament. The account we have here of David's life and reign, and especially of his troubles, is a key to many of his Psalms; and much light is given to most of the prophecies by these histories. 2. Though we have not altogether so many types of Christ here as we had in the history and the law of Moses, yet even here we meet with many who were figures of him that was to come, such as Joshua, Samson, Solomon, Cyrus, but especially David, whose kingdom was typical of the kingdom of the Messiah and the covenant of royalty made with him, a dark representation of the covenant of redemption made with the eternal Word; nor know we how to call Christ the son of David unless we be acquainted with this history, nor



now to receive the declaration that John Baptist was the *Elias that was to come*, Matt. xi. 14. 3. The state of the Jewish church which is here set before us was typical of the gospel church and the state of that in the days of the Messiah; and, as the prophecies which related to it looked further to the latter days, so did the histories of it; and still *these things happened to them for ensamples*, 1 Cor. x. 11. By the tenour of this history we are given to understand these three things concerning the church (for *the thing that hath been is that which shall be*, Eccl. i. 9):—(1.) That we are not to expect the perfect purity and unity of the church in this world, and therefore not to be stumbled, though we are grieved, at its corruptions, distempers, and divisions; we are not to think it strange concerning them, as though some strange thing happened, much less to think the worse of its laws and constitutions for the sake of them or to despair of its perpetuity. What wretched stains of idolatry, impiety, and immorality, appear on the Jewish church, and what a woeful breach was there between Judah and Ephraim! yet God took them (as I may say) with all their faults, and never wholly rejected them till they rejected the Messiah. *Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah, of their God, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel*, Jer. li. 5. (2.) That we are not to expect the constant tranquillity and prosperity of the church. It was then often oppressed and afflicted from its youth, had its years of servitude as well as its days of triumph, was often obscured, diminished, impoverished, and brought low; and yet still God secured to himself a remnant, *a holy seed, which was the substance thereof*, Isa. vi. 13. Let us not then be surprised to see the gospel church sometimes under hatches, and driven into the wilderness, and the gates of hell prevailing far against it. (3.) That yet we need not fear the utter extirpation of it. The gospel church is called the *Israel of God* (Gal. vi. 16), and the *Jerusalem which is above* (Gal. iv. 26), the *heavenly Jerusalem*; for as *Israel after the flesh*, and the *Jerusalem that then was*, by the wonderful care of the divine Providence, outrode all the storms with which they were tossed and threatened, and continued in being till they were made to resign all their honours to the gospel church, which they were the figures of, so shall that also, notwithstanding all its shocks, be preserved, till the mystery of God shall be finished, and the kingdom of grace shall have its perfection in the kingdom of glory. 4. This history is of great use to us for our direction in the way of our duty; it was written for our learning, that we may see the evil we should avoid and be armed against it, and the good we should do and be quickened to it. Though they are generally judges, and kings, and great men, whose lives are here written, yet in them even those of the meanest rank may see the deformity of sin and hate it, and the beauty of holiness and be in love with it; nay, the greater the person is the more evident are both these; for, if the great be good, it is their goodness that makes their greatness honourable; if bad, their greatness does but make their badness the more shameful. The failings even of good people are also recorded here for our admonition, that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall, and that he who has fallen may not despair of forgiveness if he recover himself by repentance. 5. This history, as it shows what God requires of us, so it shows what we may expect from his providence, especially concerning states and kingdoms. By the dealings of God with the Jewish nation it appears that, as nations are, so they must expect to fare—that while princes and people serve the interests of God's kingdom among men he will secure and advance their interests, but that when they shake off his government, and rebel against him, they can look for no other than an inundation of judgments. It was so all along with Israel; while they kept close to God they prospered; when they forsook him every thing went cross. That great man archbishop Tillotson (*Vol. I. Sermon 3. on Prov. xiv. 34*) suggests that though, as to particular persons, the providences of God are promiscuously administered in this world, because there is another world of rewards and punishments for them, yet it is not so with nations as such, but national virtues are ordinarily rewarded with temporal blessings and national sins punished with temporal judgments, because, as he says, public bodies and communities of men, as such, can be rewarded and punished only in this world, for in the next they will all be dissolved. So plainly are God's ways of disposing kingdoms laid before us in the glass of this history that I could wish Christian statesmen would think themselves as much concerned as preachers to acquaint themselves with it; they might fetch as good maxims of state and rules of policy from this as from the best of the Greek and Roman historians. We are blessed (as the Jews were) with a divine revelation, and make a national profession of religion and relation to God, and therefore are to look upon ourselves as in a peculiar manner under a divine regimen, so that the things which happened to them were designed for ensamples to us.

I cannot pretend to write for great ones. But if what is here done may be delightful to any in reading and helpful in understanding and improving this sacred history, and governing themselves by the dictates of it, let God have all the glory and let all the rivers return to the ocean whence they came. When I look back on what is done I see nothing to boast of, but a great deal to be ashamed of; and, when I look forward on what is to be done, I see nothing in myself to trust to for the doing of it. I have no sufficiency of my own; but *by the grace of God I am what I am*, and that grace will, I trust, be sufficient for me. *Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and*

*strength.* That blessed *ἐπιχορηγία* which the apostle speaks of (Phil. i. 19), that continual supply or communication of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is what we may in faith pray for, and depend upon, to furnish us for every good word and work. The pleasantness of the study has drawn me on to the writing of this, and the candour with which my friends have been pleased to receive my poor endeavours on the Pentateuch encourages me to publish it; it is done according to the best of my skill, not without some care and application of mind, in the same method and manner with that; I wish I could have done it in less compass, that it might have been more within reach of the poor of the flock. But then it would not have been so plain and full as I desire it may be for the benefit of the lambs of the flock. *Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio*—labouring to be concise I become obscure. With a humble submission to the divine providence and its disposals, and a humble reliance on the divine grace and its guidance and operation, I purpose still to proceed, as I have time, in this work. Two volumes more will, if God permit, conclude the Old Testament; and then if my friends encourage me, and my God spare me and enable me for it, I intend to go on to the New Testament. For though many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those parts of scripture which are yet before us (Luke i. 1), whose works praise them in the gates and are likely to outlive mine, yet while the subject is really so copious as it is and the manner of handling it may possibly be so various, and while one book comes into the hands of some and another into the hands of others, and all concur in the same design to advance the common interests of Christ's kingdom, the common faith once delivered to the saints, and the common salvation of precious souls (Tit. i. 4, Jude 3), I hope store of this kind will be thought too sore. I make bold to mention my purpose to proceed thus publicly in hopes I may have the advice of my friends in it, and their prayers for me that I may be made more ready and mighty in the scriptures, that understanding and utterance may be given to me, and that I may obtain mercy of the Lord Jesus to be found his faithful servant, who am less than the least of all that call him Master.

M. H.

Chester,  
June 2, 1703.

# EXPOSITION,

## WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

### OF THE BOOK OF

# J O S H U A.

---

I. We have now before us the history of the Jewish nation in this book and those that follow it to the end of the book of Esther. These books, to the end of the books of the Kings, the Jewish writers call *the first book of the prophets*, to bring them within the distribution of the books of the *Old Testament*, into the Law, the Prophets, and the *Chetubim*, or *Hagiographa*, Luke xxiv. 44. The rest they make part of the *Hagiographa*. For, though history is their subject, it is justly supposed that prophets were their penmen. To those books that are purely and properly *prophetical* the name of the prophet is prefixed, because the credibility of the prophecies depended much upon the character of the prophets; but these historical books, it is probable, were collections of the authentic records of the nation, which some of the prophets (and the Jewish church was for many ages more or less continually blessed with such) were divinely directed and helped to put together for the service of the church to the end of the world; as their other officers, so their historiographers, had their authority *from heaven*.—It should seem that though the substance of the several histories was written when the events were fresh in memory, and written under a divine direction, yet, under the same direction, they were put into the form in which we now have them by some other hand, long afterwards, probably all by the same hand, or about the same time. The grounds of the conjecture are, 1. Because former writings are so often referred to, as the Book of Jasher (Josh. x. 13 and 2 Sam. i. 18), the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, and the books of Gad, Nathan, and Iddo. 2. Because the days when the things were done are spoken of sometimes as days long since passed; as 1 Sam. ix. 9, *He that is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer*. And, 3. Because we so often read of things remaining *unto this day*; as stones (Josh. iv. 9; vii. 26; viii. 29; x. 27; 1 Sam. vi. 18), names of places (Josh. v. 9; vii. 26; Judg. i. 26; xv. 19; xviii. 12; 2 Kings xiv. 7), rights and possessions (Judg. i. 21; 1 Sam. xxvii. 6), customs and usages (1 Sam. v. 5; 2 Kings xvii. 41), which clauses have been since added to the history by the inspired collectors for the confirmation and illustration of it to those of their own age. And, if one may offer a mere conjecture, it is not unlikely that the historical books, to the end of the Kings, were put together by Jeremiah the prophet, a little before the captivity; for it is said of Ziklag (1 Sam. xxvii. 6) that it pertains to the *kings of Judah* (which style began after Solomon and ended in the captivity) *unto this day*. And it is still more probable that those which follow were put together by Ezra the scribe, some time after the captivity. However, though we are in the dark concerning their authors, we are in no doubt concerning their authority: they were a part of the oracles of God, which were committed to the Jews, and were so received and referred to by our Saviour and the apostles.

In the five books of Moses we had a very full account of the rise, advance, and constitution, of the Old-Testament church, the family out of which it was raised, the promise, that great charter by which it was incorporated, the miracles by which it was built up, and the laws and ordinances by which it was to be governed, from which one would conceive an expectation of its character and state very different from what we find in this history. A nation that had statutes and judgments so righteous, one would think, should have been very holy; and a nation that had promises so rich should have been very happy. But, alas! a great part of the history is a melancholy representation of their sins and miseries; for *the law made nothing perfect*, but this was to be done by the *bringing in of the better hope*. And yet, if we compare the history of the Christian church with its constitution, we shall find the same cause for wonder, so many have been its errors and corruptions; for neither does the *gospel make any thing perfect* in this world, but leaves us still in expectation of a *better hope* in the future state.

II. We have next before us the *book of Joshua*, so called, perhaps, not because it was written by him, for that is uncertain. Dr Lightfoot thinks that Phinehas wrote it. Bishop Patrick is clear that Joshua wrote it himself. However that be, it is written *concerning* him, and, if any other wrote it, it was collected out of his journals or memoirs. It contains the history of Israel under the command and government of Joshua, how he presided as general of their armies, 1. In their entrance into Canaan, *ch. i.—v.* 2. In their conquest of Canaan, *ch. vi.—xii.* 3. In the distribution of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel, *ch. xiii.—xxi.* 4. In the settlement and establishment of religion among them, *ch. xxii.—xxiv.* In all which he was a great example of wisdom, courage, fidelity, and piety, to all that are in places of public trust.

But this is not all the use that is to be made of this history. We may see in it, 1. *Much of God and his providence*—his power in the kingdom of nature, his justice in punishing the Canaanites when the *measure of their iniquity was full*, his faithfulness to his covenant with the patriarchs, and his kindness to his people Israel, notwithstanding their provocations. We may see him as the Lord of Hosts *determining the issues of war*, and as the director of the lot, *determining the bounds of men's habitations*. 2. *Much of Christ and his grace*. Though Joshua is not expressly mentioned in the New Testament as a type of Christ, yet all agree that he was a very eminent one. He bore our Saviour's name, as did also another type of him, Joshua the high priest, Zech. vi. 11, 12. The LXX., giving the name of Joshua a Greek termination, call him all along Ἰησοῦς, *Jesus*, and so he is called Acts vii. 45, and Heb. iv. 8. Justin Martyr, one of the first writers of the Christian church (*Dialog. cum Tryph. p. mihi 300*), makes that promise in Exod. xxiii. 20, *My angel shall bring thee into the place I have prepared*, to point at Joshua: and these words, *My name is in him*, to refer to this, that his name should be the same with that of the Messiah. It signifies, *He shall save*. Joshua saves God's people from the Canaanites; our Lord Jesus saves them *from their sins*. Christ, as Joshua, is the *captain of our salvation, a leader and commander of the people*, to tread Satan under their feet, to put them in possession of the heavenly Canaan, and to *give them rest*, which (it is said, Heb. iv. 8) Joshua did not.

## CHAP. I.

The book begins with the history, not of Joshua's life (many remarkable passages of that we had before in the books of Moses) but of his reign and government. In this chapter, I. God appoints him to the government in the stead of Moses, gives him an ample commission, full instructions, and great encouragements, ver. 1-9. II. He accepts the government, and addresses himself immediately to the business of it, giving orders to the officers of the people in general, ver. 10, 11, and particularly to the two tribes and a half, ver. 12-15. III. The people agree to it, and take an oath of fealty to him, ver. 16-18. A reign which thus began with God could not but be honourable to the prince and comfortable to the subject. The last words of Moses are still verified, "Happy art thou, O Israel! Who is like unto thee, O people?" Deut. xxxiii. 29.

**N**OW after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, *even to the children of Israel*. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, *so I will be with thee*: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them. 7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant

commanded thee: turn not from it *to the right hand or to the left*, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Honour is here put upon Joshua, and great power lodged in his hand, by him that is the fountain of honour and power, and by whom kings reign. Instructions are given him by Infinite Wisdom, and encouragements by the God of all consolation. God had before spoken to Moses concerning him (Num. xxvii. 18), but now he speaks to him (*v. 1*), probably as he spoke to Moses (Lev. i. 1) *out of the tabernacle of the congregation*, where Joshua had with Moses presented himself (Deut. xxxi. 14), to learn the way of attending there. Though Eleazar had the breast-plate of judgment, which Joshua was directed to consult as there was occasion (Num. xxvii. 21), yet, for his greater encouragement, God here speaks to him immediately, some think in a dream or vision (as Job xxxiii. 15); for though God has tied us to instituted ordinances, in them to attend him, yet he has not tied himself to them, but that he may without them make himself known to his people, and speak to their hearts otherwise than by their ears. Concerning Joshua's call to the government observe here.

1. The time when it was given him. *After the death of Moses*. As soon as ever Moses

was dead, Joshua took upon him the administration, by virtue of his solemn ordination in Moses's life-time. An interregnum, though but for a few days, might have been of bad consequence; but it is probable that God did not speak to him to go forward towards Canaan till after the thirty days of mourning for Moses were ended; not, as the Jews say, because the sadness of his spirit during those days unfitted him for communion with God (he sorrowed not as one that had no hope), but by this solemn pause, and a month's adjournment of the public councils, even now when time was so very precious to them, God would put an honour upon the memory of Moses, and give time to the people not only to lament their loss of him, but to repent of their miscarriages towards him during the forty years of his government.

II. The place Joshua had been in before he was thus preferred. He was Moses's minister, that is, an immediate attendant upon his person and assistant in business. The LXX. translate it *ἰστοῦργος*, a workman under Moses, under his direction and command. Observe, 1. He that was here called to honour had been long bred to business. Our Lord Jesus himself took upon him the form of a servant, and then God highly exalted him. 2. He was trained up in subjection and under command. Those are fittest to rule that have learnt to obey. 3. He that was to succeed Moses was intimately acquainted with him, that he might *fully know his doctrine and manner of life, his purpose and long-suffering* (2 Tim. iii. 10), might take the same measures, walk in the same spirit, in the same steps, having to carry on the same work. 4. He was herein a type of Christ, who might therefore be called Moses's minister, because he was made under the law and fulfilled all the righteousness of it.

III. The call itself that God gave him, which is very full.

1. The consideration upon which he was called to the government: *Moses my servant is dead, v. 2.* All good men are God's servants; and it is no disparagement, but an honour, to the greatest of men to be so: angels themselves are his ministers. Moses was called to extraordinary work, was a steward in God's house, and in the discharge of the trusts reposed in him he served not himself but God who employed him; he was faithful as a servant, and with an eye to the Son, as is intimated, Heb. iii. 5, where what he did is said to be for a *testimony of the things that should be spoken after.* God will own his servants, will confess them in the great day. But Moses, though God's servant, and one that could ill be spared, is dead; for God will change hands, to show that whatever instruments he uses he is not tied to any. Moses, when he has done his work as a servant, dies and goes to *rest from his labours, and enters into the joy of his*

*Lord.* Observe, God takes notice of the death of his servants. It is precious in his sight, Ps. cxvi. 15.

2. The call itself. *Now therefore arise.* (1.) "Though Moses is dead, the work must go on; therefore arise, and go about it." Let not weeping hinder sowing, nor the withering of the most useful hands be the weakening of ours; for, when God has work to do, he will either find or make instruments fit to carry it on. Moses the *servant* is dead, but God the *Master* is not: he lives for ever. (2.) "Because Moses is dead, therefore the work devolves upon thee as his successor, for herenunto thou wast appointed. Therefore there is need of thee to fill up his place; up, and be doing." Note, [1.] The removal of useful men should quicken survivors to be so much the more diligent in doing good. Such and such are dead, and we must die shortly, therefore let us work while it is day. [2.] It is a great mercy to a people, if, when useful men are taken away in the midst of their usefulness, others are raised up in their stead to go on where they broke off. Joshua must arise to finish what Moses began. Thus the latter generations enter into the labours of the former. And thus Christ, our Joshua, does that for us which could never be done by the law of Moses,—*justifies* (Acts xiii. 39), and *sanctifies*, Romans viii. 3. The life of Moses made way for Joshua, and prepared the people for what was to be done by him. Thus the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ: and then the death of Moses made room for Joshua; thus we are dead to the law, our first husband, that we may be *married to Christ*, Rom. vii. 4.

3. The particular service he was now called out to: "*Arise, go over this Jordan, this river which you have in view, and on the banks of which you lie encamped.*" This was a trial to the faith of Joshua, whether he would give orders to make preparation for passing the river when there was no visible way of getting over it, at least not at this place and at this time, when *all the banks were overflowed*, ch. iii. 15. He had no pontons or bridge of boats by which to convey them over, and yet he must believe that God, who had ordered them over, would open a way for them. Going over Jordan was going into Canaan; thither Moses might not, could not, bring them, Deut. xxxi. 2. Thus the honour of bringing the many sons to glory is reserved for Christ the *captain of our salvation*, Heb. ii. 10.

4. The grant of the land of Canaan to the children of Israel is here repeated (v. 2—4): *I do give it them.* To the patriarchs it was promised, *I will give it*; but, now that the fourth generation had expired, the iniquity of the Amorites was full, and the time had come for the performance of the promise, it is actually conveyed, and they are put in possession of that which they had long been in expectation of: "*I do give it, enter upon*

it, it is all your own; nay (v. 3), *I have given it*; though it be yet unconquered, it is as sure to you as if it were in your hands." Observe, (1.) The persons to whom the conveyance is made: *To them, even to the children of Israel* (v. 2), because they are the seed of Jacob, who was called *Israel* at the time when this promise was made to him, Gen. xxxv. 10, 12. The children of Israel, though they had been very provoking in the wilderness, yet, for their fathers' sakes, should have the entail preserved. And it was the children of the murmurers that God said should enter Canaan, Num. xiv. 31. (2.) The land itself that is conveyed: From the river Euphrates eastward, to the Mediterranean Sea westward, v. 4. Though their sin cut them short of this large possession, and they never replenished all the country within the bounds here mentioned, yet, had they been obedient, God would have given them this and much more. Out of all these countries, and many others, there were in process of time proselytes to the Jewish religion, as appears, Acts ii. 5, &c. If their church was enlarged, though their nation was not multiplied, it cannot be said that the promise was of no effect. And, if this promise had not its full accomplishment in the letter, believers might thence infer that it had a further meaning, and was to be fulfilled in the kingdom of the Messiah, both that of grace and that of glory. (3.) The condition is here implied upon which this grant is made, in those words, *as I said unto Moses*, that is, "upon the terms that Moses told you of many a time, *if you will keep my statutes*, you shall go in and possess that good land. Take it under those provisos and limitations, and not otherwise." The precept and promise must not be separated. (4.) It is intimated with what ease they should gain the possession of this land, if it were not their own fault, in these words, "*Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon* (within the following bounds) shall be your own. Do but set your foot upon it and you have it."

5. The promises God here makes to Joshua for his encouragement. (1.) That he should be sure of the presence of God with him in this great work to which he was called (v. 5): "*As I was with Moses*, to direct and strengthen him, to own and prosper him, and give him success in bringing Israel out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness, so I will be with thee to enable thee to settle them in Canaan." Joshua was sensible how far he came short of Moses in wisdom and grace; but what Moses did was done by virtue of the presence of God with him, and, though Joshua had not always the same presence of mind that Moses had, yet, if he had always the same presence of God, he would do well enough. Note, It is a great comfort to the rising generation of ministers and Christians that the same grace which was sufficient for those that went be-

fore them shall not be wanting to them if they be not wanting to themselves in the improvement of it. It is repeated here again (v. 9), "*The Lord thy God is with thee* as a God of power, and that power engaged for thee whithersoever thou goest." Note, Those that go where God sends them shall have him with them wherever they go, and they need desire no more to make them easy and prosperous. (2.) That the presence of God should never be withdrawn from him: *I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee*, v. 5. Moses had assured him of this (Deut. xxxi. 8), that, though he must now leave him, God never would: and here God himself confirms that word of his servant Moses (Isa. xlv. 26), and engages never to leave Joshua. We need the presence of God, not only when we are beginning our work to set us in, but in the progress of it to further us with a continual help. If that at any time fail us, we are gone; but of this we may be sure, that *the Lord is with us while we are with him*. This promise here made to Joshua is applied to all believers, and improved as an argument against covetousness, Heb. xiii. 5, *Be content with such things as you have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee*. (3.) That he should have victory over all the enemies of Israel (v. 5): *There shall not any man* that comes against thee *be able to stand before thee*. Note, There is no standing before those that have God on their side. *If he be for us, who can be against us?* God promises him clear success—the enemy should not make any head against him; and constant success—all the days of his life. However it might be with Israel when he was gone, all his reign should be graced with triumphs. What Joshua had himself encouraged the people with long ago (Num. xiv. 9) God here encourages him with. (4.) That he should himself have the dividing of this land among the people of Israel, v. 6. It was a great encouragement to him in beginning this work that he was sure to see it finished and his labour should not be in vain. Some make it a reason why he should arm himself with resolution, and be of good courage, because of the bad character of the people whom he must cause to inherit that land. He knew well what a froward discontented people they were, and how unmanageable they had been in his predecessor's time; let him therefore expect vexation from them and be of good courage.

6. The charge or command he gives to Joshua, which is,

(1.) That he conform himself in every thing to the law of God, and make this his rule, v. 7, 8. God does, as it were, put the book of the law into Joshua's hand; as, when Joash was crowned, they gave him the testimony, 2 Kings vi. 12. And concerning this book he is charged, [1.] *To meditate therein day and night*, that he might understand it and have it ready to him upon all occasions. If ever any man's business might have ex-

eused him from meditation, and other acts of devotion, one would think Joshua's might at this time. It was a great trust that was lodged in his hands; the care of it was enough to fill him, if he had had ten souls, and yet he must find time and thoughts for meditation. Whatever affairs of this world we have to mind, we must not neglect the one thing needful. [2.] Not to let it depart out of his mouth; that is, all his orders to the people, and his judgments upon appeals made to him, must be consonant to the law of God; upon all occasions he must *speak according to this rule*, Isa. viii. 20. Joshua was to maintain and carry on the work that Moses had begun, and therefore he must not only complete the salvation Moses had wrought for them, but must uphold the holy religion he had established among them. There was no occasion to make new laws; but *that good thing which was committed to him* he must carefully and faithfully keep, 2 Tim. i. 14. [3.] He must *observe to do according to all this law*. To this end he must meditate therein, not for contemplation-sake only, or to fill his head with notions, or that he might find something to puzzle the priests with, but that he might, both as a man and as a magistrate, observe to do *according to what was written* therein; and several things were written there which had particular reference to the business he had now before him, as the laws concerning their wars, the destroying of the Canaanites and the dividing of Canaan, &c.; these he must religiously observe. Joshua was a man of great power and authority, yet he must himself be under command and do as he is bidden. No man's dignity or dominion, how great soever, sets him above the law of God. Joshua must not only govern by law, and take care that the people observed the law, but he must observe it himself, and so by his own example maintain the honour and power of it. *First*, He must do what was written. It is not enough to hear and read the word, to commend and admire it, to know and remember it, to talk and discourse of it, but we must do it. *Secondly*, He must do according to what was written, exactly observing the law as his copy, and doing, not only that which was there required, but in all circumstances according to the appointment. *Thirdly*, He must do according to all that was written, without exception or reserve, having a *respect to all God's commandments*, even those which are most displeasing to flesh and blood. *Fourthly*, He must observe to do so, observe the checks of conscience, the hints of providence, and all the advantages of opportunity. Careful observance is necessary to universal obedience. *Fifthly*, He must *not turn from it*, either in his own practice or in any act of government, to the right hand or to the left, for there are errors on both hands, and virtue is in the mean. *Sixthly*, He must be *strong and cou-*

*rageous*, that he might do according to the law. So many discouragements there are in the way of duty that those who will proceed and persevere in it must put on resolution. And, *lastly*, to encourage him in his obedience, he assures him that then he shall *do wisely* (as it is in the margin) and *make his way prosperous*, v. 7, 8. Those that make the word of God their rule, and conscientiously walk by that rule, shall both do well and speed well; it will furnish them with the best maxims by which to order their conversation (Ps. cxi. 10); and it will entitle them to the best blessings: God shall *give them the desire of their heart*.

(2.) That he encourage himself herein with the promise and presence of God, and make these his stay (v. 6): *Be strong and of a good courage*. And again (v. 7), as if this was the one thing needful: *Only be strong and very courageous*. And he concludes with this (v. 9): *Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed*. Joshua had long since signalized his valour, in the war with Amalek, and in his dissent from the report of the evil spies; and yet God sees fit thus to inculcate this precept upon him. Those that have grace have need to be called upon again and again to exercise grace and to improve in it. Joshua was humble and low in his own eyes, not distrustful of God, and his power, and promise, but diffident of himself, and of his own wisdom, and strength, and sufficiency for the work, especially coming after so great a man as Moses; and therefore God repeats this so often, "*Be strong and of a good courage*; let not the sense of thy own infirmities dishearten thee; God is all-sufficient. *Have not I commanded thee?*" [1.] "I have commanded the work to be done, and therefore it shall be done, how invincible soever the difficulties may seem that lie in the way." Nay, [2.] "I have commanded, called, and commissioned, thee to do it, and therefore will be sure to own thee, and strengthen thee, and bear thee out in it." Note, When we are in the way of our duty we have reason to be strong and very courageous; and it will help very much to animate and embolden us if we keep our eye upon the divine warrant, and hear God saying, "*Have not I commanded thee?*" I will therefore help thee, succeed thee, accept thee, reward thee." Our Lord Jesus, as Joshua here, was borne up under his sufferings by a regard to the will of God and the commandment he had received from his Father, John x. 18.

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11 Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD

your God giveth you to possess it. 12 And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, 13 Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. 14 Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; 15 Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as *he hath given you*, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD's servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.

Joshua, being settled in the government, immediately applies himself to business; not to take state or to take his pleasure, but to further the work of God among the people over whom God had set him. As he that desires the office of a minister (1 Tim. iii. 1), so he that desires the office of a magistrate, desires a work, a good work; neither is preferred to be idle.

I. He issues out orders to the people to provide for a march; and they had been so long encamped in their present post that it would be a work of some difficulty to decamp. The officers of the people that commanded under Joshua in their respective tribes and families attended him for orders, which they were to transmit to the people. Inferior magistrates are as necessary and as serviceable to the public good in their places as the supreme magistrate in his. What could Joshua have done without officers? We are therefore required to be subject, not only to the king as supreme, but to governors as to those that are sent by him, 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. By these officers, 1. Joshua gives public notice that they were to pass over Jordan within three days. These orders, I suppose, were not given till after the return of the spies that were sent to bring an account of Jericho, though the story of that affair follows, ch. ii. And perhaps that was such an instance of his jealousy, and excessive caution, as made it necessary that he should be so often bidden as he was to be strong and of a good courage. Observe with what assurance Joshua says to the people, because God had said it to him, *You shall pass over Jordan, and shall possess the land.* We greatly honour the truth of God when we stagger not at the promise of God. 2. He gives them directions to prepare

victuals, not to prepare transport vessels. He that bore them out of Egypt upon eagles' wings would in like manner bear them into Canaan, to bring them to himself, Exod. xiv. 4. But those that were desirous to have other victuals besides the manna, which had not yet ceased, must prepare it, and have it ready against the time appointed. Perhaps, though the manna did not quite cease till they came into Canaan (ch. v. 12), yet since they had come into a land inhabited (Exod. xvi. 35), where they might be furnished in part with other provisions, it did not fall so plentifully, nor did they gather so much as when they had it first given to them in the wilderness, but decreased gradually, and therefore they are ordered to provide other victuals, in which perhaps was included all other things necessary to their march. And some of the Jewish writers, considering that having manna they needed not to provide other victuals, understand it figuratively, that they must repent of their sins, and make their peace with God, and resolve to live a new life, that they might be ready to receive this great favour. See Exod. xiv. 10, 11.

II. He reminds the two tribes and a half of the obligations they were under to go over Jordan with their brethren, though they left their possessions and families on this side. Interest would make the other tribes glad to go over Jordan, but in these it was an act of self-denial, and against the grain; therefore it was needful to produce the agreement which Moses had made with them, when he gave them their possession before their brethren (v. 13): *Remember the word which Moses commanded you.* Some of them perhaps were ready to think now that Moses was dead, who they thought was too hard upon them in this matter, they might find some excuse or other to release themselves from this engagement, or might prevail with Joshua to dispense with them; but he holds them to it, and lets them know that, though Moses was dead, his commands and their promises were still in full force. He reminds them, 1. Of the advantages they had received in being first settled: "*The Lord your God hath given you rest.*" He has given your minds rest; you know what you have to trust to, and are not as the rest of the tribes waiting the issue of the war first and then of the lot. He has also given your families rest, your wives and children, whose settlement is your satisfaction. He has given you rest by giving you this land, this good land, of which you are in full and quiet possession." Note, When God by his providence has given us rest we ought to consider how we may honour him with the advantages of it, and what service we may do to our brethren who are unsettled, or not so well settled as we are. When God had given David rest (2 Sam. vii. 1), see how restless he was till he had found out a habitation for the ark, Ps. cxxii. 4, 5. When God has given us rest, we must take heed of slothfulness and of setting



upon our lees. 2. He reminds them of their agreement to help their brethren in the wars of Canaan till God had in like manner given them rest, v. 14, 15. This was, (1.) Reasonable in itself. So closely were all the tribes incorporated that they must needs look upon themselves as members one of another. (2.) It was enjoined them by Moses, the servant of the Lord; he commanded them to do this, and Joshua his successor would see his commands observed. (3.) It was the only expedient they had to save themselves from the guilt of a great sin in settling on that side Jordan, a sin which would one time or other find them out, Num. xxxii. 23. (4.) It was the condition of the grant Moses had made them of the land they were possessed of, so that they could not be sure of a good title to, or a comfortable enjoyment of, *the land of their possession*, as it is here called (v. 15), if they did not fulfil the condition. (5.) They themselves had covenanted and agreed thereunto (Num. xxxii. 25): *Thy servants will do as my Lord commandeth*. Thus we all lie under manifold obligations to strengthen the hands one of another, and not to seek our own welfare only, but one another's.

16 And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. 17 According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses. 18 Whosoever *he be* that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.

This answer was given not by the two tribes and a half only (though they are spoken of immediately before), but by the *officers of all the people* (v. 10), as their representatives, concurring with the divine appointment, by which Joshua was set over them, and they did it heartily, and with a great deal of cheerfulness and resolution.

I. They promise him obedience (v. 16), not only as subjects to their prince, but as soldiers to their general, of whose particular orders they are to be observant. He that hath *soldiers under him saith to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh*, Matt. viii. 9. Thus the people of Israel here engage themselves to Joshua: "*All that thou commandest us we will readily do, without murmuring or disputing; and whithersoever thou sendest us, though upon the most difficult and perilous expedition, we will go.*" We must thus swear allegiance to our Lord Jesus, as the captain of our salva-

tion, and bind ourselves to do what he commands us by his word, and to go where he sends us by his providence. And since Joshua, being humbly conscious to himself how far short he came of Moses, feared he should not have such an influence upon the people and such an interest in them as Moses had, they here promise that they will be as obedient to him as ever they had been to Moses, v. 17. To speak truth, they had no reason to boast of their obedience to Moses; he had found them a stiff-necked people, Deut. ix. 24. But they meant that they would be as observant of Joshua as they should have been, and as some of them were (and the generality of them at least sometimes) of Moses. Note, We must not so magnify those that are gone, how eminent soever they were, either in the magistracy or in the ministry, as to be wanting in the honour and duty we owe to those that survive and succeed them, though in gifts they may come short of them. Obedience for conscience' sake will continue, though Providence change the hands by which it rules and acts.

II. They pray for the presence of God with him (v. 17): "*Only the Lord thy God be with thee, to bless and prosper thee, and give thee success, as he was with Moses.*" Prayers and supplications are to be made for all in authority, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. And the best thing we can ask of God for our magistrates is that they may have the presence of God with them; this will make them blessings to us, so that in seeking this for them we consult our own interest. A reason is here intimated why they would obey him as they had obeyed Moses, because they believed (and in faith prayed) that God's presence would be with him as it was with Moses. Those that we have reason to think have favour from God should have honour and respect from us. Some understand it as a limitation of their obedience: "We will obey only as far as we perceive the Lord is with thee, but no further. While thou keepest close to God we will keep close to thee; hitherto shall our obedience come, but no further." But they were so far from having any suspicion of Joshua's deviating from the divine rule that there needed not such a proviso.

III. They pass an act to make it death for any Israelite to disobey Joshua's orders, or *rebel against his commandment*, v. 18. Perhaps if such a law had been made in Moses's time it might have prevented many of the rebellions that were formed against him; for most men fear the sword of the magistrate more than the justice of God. Yet there was a special reason for the making of this law now that they were entering upon the wars of Canaan; for in times of war the severity of military discipline is more necessary than at other times. Some think that in this statute they had an eye to that law concerning the prophet God would raise up like

unto Moses, which they think, though it refer chiefly to Christ, yet takes in Joshua by the way as a type of him, that whosoever would not hearken to him should be cut off from his people. Deut. xviii. 19, *I will require it of him.*

IV. They animate him to go on with cheerfulness in the work to which God had called him; and, in desiring that he would be strong and of a good courage, they did in effect promise him that they would do all they could, by an exact, bold, and cheerful observance of all his orders, to encourage him. It very much heartens those that lead in a good work to see those that follow follow with a good will. Joshua, though of approved valour, did not take it as an affront, but as a great kindness, for the people to bid him be strong and of a good courage.

#### CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have an account of the scouts that were employed to bring an account to Joshua of the posture of the city of Jericho. Observe here, I. How Joshua sent them, ver. 1. II. How Rahab received them, and protected them, and told a lie for them (ver. 2-7), so that they escaped out of the hands of the enemy. III. The account she gave them of the present posture of Jericho, and the panic-fear they were struck with upon the approach of Israel, ver. 8-11. IV. The bargain she made with them for the security of herself and her relations in the ruin she saw coming upon her city, ver. 12-21. V. Their safe return to Joshua, and the account they gave him of their expedition, ver. 22-24. And that which makes this story most remarkable is that Rahab, the person principally concerned in it, is twice celebrated in the New Testament as a great believer (Heb. xi. 31) and as one whose faith proved itself by good works, James ii. 25.

AND Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into a harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country. 3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. 4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: 5 And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. 6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof. 7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon

as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

In these verses we have,

1. The prudence of Joshua, in sending spies to observe this important pass, which was likely to be disputed at the entrance of Israel into Canaan (v. 1). *Go view the land, even Jericho.* Moses had sent spies (Num. xiii.); Joshua himself was one of them; and it proved of ill consequence. Yet Joshua now sent spies, not, as the former were sent, to survey the whole land, but Jericho only; not to bring the account to the whole congregation, but to Joshua only, who, like a watchful general, was continually projecting for the public good, and was particularly careful to take the first step well and not to stumble at the threshold. It was not fit that Joshua should venture over Jordan, to make his remarks *incognito—in disguise*; but he sends two men (two young men, say the LXX.), to view the land, that from their report he might take his measures in attacking Jericho. Observe, 1. There is no remedy, but great men must see with other people's eyes, which makes it very necessary that they be cautious in the choice of those they employ, since so much often depends upon their fidelity. 2. Faith in God's promise ought not to supersede but encourage our diligence in the use of proper means. Joshua is sure he has God with him, and yet sends men before him. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if our expectations slacken our endeavours. 3. See how ready these men were to go upon this hazardous enterprise. Though they put their lives in their hands, yet they ventured in obedience to Joshua their general, in zeal for the service of the camp, and in dependence upon the power of that God who, being the keeper of Israel in general, is the protector of every particular Israelite in the way of his duty.

II. The providence of God directing the spies to the house of Rahab. How they got over Jordan we are not told; but into Jericho they came, which was about seven or eight miles from the river, and there seeking for a convenient inn were directed to the house of Rahab, here called a *harlot*, a woman that had formerly been of ill fame, the reproach of which stuck to her name, though of late she had repented and reformed. Simon the leper (Matt. xxvi. 6), though cleansed from his leprosy, wore the reproach of it in his name as long as he lived; so Rahab the harlot; and she is so called in the New Testament, where both her faith and her good works are praised, to teach us, 1. That the greatness of sin is no bar to pardoning mercy if it be truly repented of in time. We read of publicans and harlots entering into the kingdom of the Messiah, and being welcomed to all the privileges of that kingdom, Matt. xxi. 31. 2. That there are many who before their conversion were

very wicked and vile, and yet afterwards come to great eminence in faith and holiness. 3. Even those that through grace have repented of the sins of their youth must expect to bear the reproach of them, and when they hear of their old faults must renew their repentance, and, as an evidence of that, hear of them patiently. God's Israel, for aught that appears, had but one friend, but one well-wisher in all Jericho, and that was Rahab a harlot. God has often served his own purposes and his church's interests by men of indifferent morals. Had these scouts gone to any other house than this they would certainly have been betrayed and put to death without mercy. But God knew where they had a friend that would be true to them, though they did not, and directed them thither. Thus that which seems to us most contingent and accidental is often over-ruled by the divine providence to serve its great ends. And those that faithfully acknowledge God in their ways he will *guide with his eye*. Sec. Jer. xxxvi. 19, 26.

III The piety of Rahab in receiving and protecting these Israelites. Those that keep public-houses entertain all comers, and think themselves obliged to be civil to their guests. But Rahab showed her guests more than common civility, and went upon an uncommon principle in what she did; it was *by faith* that she received those with peace against whom her king and country had denounced war, Heb. xi. 31. 1. She bade them welcome to her house; they lodged there, though it appears by what she said to them (v. 9) she knew both whence they came and what their business was. 2. Perceiving that they were observed coming into the city, and that umbrage was taken at it, she hid them upon the roof of the house, which was flat, and covered them with stalks of flax (v. 6), so that, if the officers should come thither to search for them, there they might lie undiscovered. By these stalks of flax, which she herself had lain in order upon the roof to dry in the sun, in order to the beating of it and making it ready for the wheel, it appears she had one of the good characters of the virtuous woman, however in others of them she might be deficient, that she *sought wool and flax, and wrought willingly with her hands*, Prov. xxxi. 13. From this instance of her honest industry one would hope that, whatever she had been formerly, she was not now a harlot. 3. When she was examined concerning them, she denied they were in her house, turned off the officers that had a warrant to search for them with a sham, and so secured them. No marvel that the king of Jericho sent to enquire after them (v. 2, 3); he had cause to fear when the enemy was at his door, and his fear made him suspicious and jealous of all strangers. He had reason to demand from Rahab that she should *bring forth the men* to be dealt with as spies; but Rahab not only disowned that she knew them,

or knew where they were, but, that no further search might be made for them in the city, told the pursuers they had gone away again, and in all probability might be overtaken, v. 4, 5. Now, (1.) We are sure this was a good work: it is canonized by the apostle (James ii. 25), where she is said to be *justified by works*, and this is specified, that *she received the messengers, and sent them out another way*, and she did it by faith, such a faith as set her above the fear of man, even of the wrath of the king. She believed, upon the report she had heard of the wonders wrought for Israel, that their God was the only true God, and that therefore their declared design upon Canaan would undoubtedly take effect, and in this faith she sided with them, protected them, and courted their favour. Had she said, "I believe God is yours and Canaan yours, but I dare not show you any kindness," her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her. But by this it appeared to be both alive and lively, that she exposed herself to the utmost peril, even of life, in obedience to her faith. Note, Those only are true believers that can find in their hearts to venture for God; and those that by faith take the Lord for their God take his people for their people, and cast in their lot among them. Those that have God for their refuge and hiding-place must testify their gratitude by their readiness to shelter his people when there is occasion. *Let my outcasts dwell with thee*, Isa. xvi. 3, 4. And we must be glad of an opportunity of testifying the sincerity and zeal of our love to God by hazardous services to his church and kingdom among men. But, (2.) There is that in it which it is not easy to justify, and yet it must be justified, or else it could not be so good a work as to justify her. [1.] It is plain that she betrayed her country by harbouring the enemies of it, and aiding those that were designing its destruction, which could not consist with her allegiance to her prince and her affection and duty to the community she was a member of. But that which justifies her in this is that *she knew the Lord had given Israel this land* (v. 9), knew it by the incontestable miracles God had wrought for them, which confirmed that grant; and her obligations to God were higher than her obligations to any other. If she knew *God had given them this land*, it would have been a sin to join with those that hindered them from possessing it. But, since no such grant of any land to any people can now be proved, this will by no means justify any such treacherous practices against the public welfare. [2.] It is plain that she deceived the officers that examined her with an untruth—That she knew not whence the men were, that they had gone out, that she knew not whither they had gone. What shall we say to this? If she had either told the truth or been silent, she would have betrayed the spies, and this

would certainly have been a great sin ; and it does not appear that she had any other way of concealing them than by this ironical direction to the officers to pursue them another way, which if they would suffer themselves to be deceived by, let them be deceived. None are bound to accuse themselves, or their friends, of that which, though enquired after as a crime, they know to be a virtue. This case was altogether extraordinary, and therefore cannot be drawn into a precedent ; and that may be justified here which would be by no means lawful in a common case. Rahab knew, by what was already done on the other side Jordan, that no mercy was to be shown to the Canaanites, and thence inferred that, if mercy was not owing them, truth was not ; those that might be destroyed might be deceived. Yet divines generally conceive that it was a sin, which however admitted of this extenuation, that being a Canaanite she was not better taught the evil of lying ; but God accepted her faith and pardoned her infirmity. However it was in this case, we are sure it is our duty to speak every man the truth to his neighbour, to dread and detest lying, and never to *do evil, that evil, that good may come of it*, Rom. iii. 8. But God accepts what is sincerely and honestly intended, though there be a mixture of frailty and folly in it, and is not extreme to mark what we do amiss. Some suggest that what she said might possibly be true of some other men.

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof ; 9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt ; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that *were* on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we had heard *these things*, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you : for the LORD your God, he *is* God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. 12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token : 13 And *that* ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren,

and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. 14 And the men answered her, Our life for your's, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. 15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window : for her house *was* upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. 16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you ; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned : and afterward may ye go your way. 17 And the men said unto her, We *will be* blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. 18 Behold, *when* we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by : and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. 19 And it shall be, *that* whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood *shall be* upon his head, and we *will be* guiltless : and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head, if *any* hand be upon him. 20 And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. 21 And she said, According unto your words, so *be* it. And she sent them away, and they departed : and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

The matter is here settled between Rahab and the spies respecting the service she was now to do for them, and the favour they were afterwards to show to her. She secures them on condition that they should secure her.

1. She gives them, and by them sends to Joshua and Israel, all the encouragement that could be desired to make their intended descent upon Canaan. This was what they came for, and it was worth coming for. Having got clear of the officers, she comes up to them to the *roof of the house* where they lay hid, finds them perhaps somewhat dismayed at the peril they apprehended themselves in from the officers, and scarcely recovered from the fright, but has that to say to them which will give them abundant satis-

faction. 1. She lets them know that the report of the great things God had done for them had come to Jericho (v. 10), not only that they had an account of their late victories obtained over the Amorites in the neighbouring country, on the other side of the river, but that their miraculous deliverance out of Egypt, and passage through the Red Sea, a great way off, and forty years ago, were remembered and talked of afresh in Jericho, to the amazement of every body. Thus *this* Joshua and his fellows were *men wondered at*, Zecl. iii. 8. See how God makes his wonderful works to be remembered (Ps. cxi. 4), so that *men shall speak of the might of his terrible acts*, Ps. cxlv. 6. 2. She tells them what impressions the tidings of these things had made upon the Canaanites: *Your terror has fallen upon us* (v. 9); *our hearts did melt*, v. 11. If she kept a public house, this would give her an opportunity of understanding the sense of various companies and of travellers from other parts of the country, so that they could not know this any way better than by her information; and it would be of great use to Joshua and Israel to know it; it would put courage into the most cowardly Israelite to hear how their enemies were dispirited, and it was easy to conclude that those who now fainted before them would infallibly fall before them, especially because it was the accomplishment of a promise God had made them, that he would *lay the fear and dread of them upon all this land* (Deut. xi. 25), and so it would be an earnest of the accomplishment of all the other promises God had made to them. Let not the stout man glory in his courage, any more than the strong man in his strength; for God can weaken both mind and body. Let not God's Israel be afraid of their most powerful enemies; for their God can, when he pleases, make their most powerful enemies afraid of them. Let none think to harden their hearts against God and prosper; for he that made man's soul can at any time make the sword of his terrors approach to it. 3. She hereupon makes profession of her faith in God and his promise; and perhaps *there was not found so great faith* (all things considered), *no, not in Israel*, as in this woman of Canaan. (1.) She believes God's power and dominion over all the world (c. 11): "Jehovah your God, whom you worship and call upon, is so far above all gods that he is the only true God; for *he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath*, and is served by all the hosts of both." A vast distance there is between heaven and earth, yet both are equally under the inspection and government of the great Jehovah. Heaven is not above his power, nor is earth below his cognizance. (2.) She believes his promise to his people Israel (v. 9): *I know that the Lord hath given you the land*. The king of Jericho had heard as much as she had of the great things God had done for Israel, yet he cannot infer thence that the Lord had given them

this land, but resolves to hold it out against them to the last extremity; for the most powerful means of conviction will not of themselves attain the end without divine grace, and by that grace Rahab the harlot, who had only heard of the wonders God had wrought, speaks with more assurance of the truth of the promise made to the fathers than all the elders of Israel had done who were eye-witnesses of those wonders, many of whom perished through unbelief of this promise. *Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed*; so Rahab did. *O woman, great is thy faith!*

11. She engaged them to take her and her relations under their protection, that they might not perish in the destruction of Jericho, v. 12, 13. Now, 1. It was an evidence of the sincerity and strength of her faith concerning the approaching revolution in her country that she was so solicitous to make an interest for herself with the Israelites, and courted their kindness. She foresaw the conquest of her country, and in the belief of that bespoke in time the favour of the conquerors. Thus Noah, being *moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, and the condemning of the world*, Heb. xi. 7. Those who truly believe the divine revelation concerning the ruin of sinners, and the grant of the heavenly land to God's Israel, will give diligence to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life, by joining themselves to God and to his people. 2. The provision she made for the safety of her relations, as well as for her own, is a laudable instance of natural affection, and an intimation to us in like manner to do all we can for the salvation of the souls of those that are dear to us, and, with ourselves, to bring them, if possible, into the bond of the covenant. No mention is made of her husband and children, but only her parents, and brothers, and sisters, for whom, though she was herself a house-keeper, she retained a due concern. 3. Her request that they would swear unto her by Jehovah is an instance of her acquaintance with the only true God, and her faith in him and devotion towards him, one act of which is religiously to *swear by his name*. 4. Her petition is very just and reasonable, that, since she had protected them, they should protect her, and since her kindness to them extended to their people, for whom they were now negotiating, their kindness to her should take in all hers. It was the least they could do for one that had saved their lives with the hazard of her own. Note, Those that show mercy may expect to find mercy. Observe, She does not demand any preferment by way of reward for her kindness to them, though they lay so much at her mercy that she might have made her own terms, but only indents for her life, which in a general destruction would be a singular favour. Thus God promised Ebed-Melech, in recompence for his kindness to Jeremiah, that in the worst of

times he should have *his life for a prey*, Jer. xxxix. 18. Yet this Rahab was afterwards advanced to be a princess in Israel, the wife of Salmon, and one of the ancestors of Christ, Matt. i. 5. Those that faithfully serve Christ and suffer for him he will not only protect, but prefer, and will do for them *more than they are able to ask or think*.

III. They solemnly engaged for her preservation in the common destruction (v. 14): "*Our life for yours*. We will take as much care of your lives as of our own, and would as soon hurt ourselves as any of you." Nay, they imprecate God's judgments on themselves if they should violate their promise to her. She had pawned her life for theirs, and now they in requital pawn their lives for hers, and (as public persons) with them they pawn the public faith and the credit of their nation, for they plainly interest all Israel in the engagement in those words, *When the Lord has given us the land*, meaning not themselves only, but the people whose agents they were. No doubt they knew themselves sufficiently authorized to treat with Rahab concerning this matter, and were confident that Joshua would ratify what they did, else they had not dealt honestly; the general law that they should make no covenant with the Canaanites (Deut. vii. 2) did not forbid them to take under their protection a particular person, that had heartily come into their interests and had done them real kindnesses. The law of gratitude is one of the laws of nature. Now observe here, 1. The promises they made her. In general, "*We will deal kindly and truly with thee*, v. 14. We will not only be kind in promising now, but true in performing what we promise; and not only true in performing just what we promise, but kind in out-doing thy demands and expectations." The goodness of God is often expressed by his kindness and truth (Ps. cxvii. 2), and in both these we must be followers of him. In particular, "*If a hand be upon nay in the house with thee, his blood shall be on our head*, v. 19. If hurt come through our carelessness to those whom we are obliged to protect, we thereby contract guilt, and blood will be found a heavy load. 2. The provisos and limitations of their promises. Though they were in haste, and it may be in some confusion, yet we find them very cautious in settling this agreement and the terms of it, not to bind themselves to more than was fit for them to perform. Note, Covenants must be made with care, and we must swear in judgment, lest we find ourselves perplexed and entangled when it is too late *after rows to make enquiry*. Those that will be conscientious in keeping their promises will be cautious in making them, and perhaps may insert conditions which others may think frivolous. Their promise is here accompanied with three provisos, and they were necessary ones. They will protect Rahab, and all her relations always, provided,

(1.) That she tie the scarlet cord with which she was now about to let them down in the window of her house, v. 18. This was to be a mark upon the house, which the spies would take care to give notice of to the camp of Israel, that no soldier, how hot and eager soever he was in military executions, might offer any violence to the house that was thus distinguished. This was like the blood sprinkled upon the door-post, which secured the first-born from the destroying angel, and, being of the same colour, some allude to this also to represent the safety of believers, under the protection of the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience. The same cord that she made use of for the preservation of these Israelites was to be made use of for her preservation. What we serve and honour God with we may expect he will bless and make comfortable to us. (2.) That she should have all those whose safety she had desired in the house with her and keep them there, and that, at the time of taking the town, none of them should dare to stir out of doors, v. 18, 19. This was a *necessary proviso*, for Rahab's kindred could not be distinguished any other way than by being in her distinguished house; should they mingle with their neighbours, there was no remedy, but the sword would devour *one us well as another*. It was a *reasonable proviso* that, since they were saved purely for Rahab's sake, her house should have the honour of being their castle, and that, if they would not *perish with those that believed not*, they should thus far believe the certainty and severity of the ruin coming upon their city as to retire into a place made safe by promise, as Noah into the ark and Lot into Zoar, and should *save themselves from this untoward generation*, by separating from them. It was likewise a *significant proviso*, intimating to us that those who are added to the church that they may be saved must keep close to the society of the faithful, and, having *escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*, must take heed of being again entangled therein. (3.) That she should keep counsel (v. 14, 20): *If thou utter this our business*, that is, "If thou betray us when we are gone, or if thou make this agreement public, so as that others tie scarlet lines in their windows and so confound us, then we will be clear of thy oath." Those are unworthy of the *secret of the Lord* that know not how to keep it to themselves when there is occasion.

IV. She then took effectual care to secure her new friends, and *sent them out another way*, James ii. 25. Having fully understood the bargain they made with her, and consented to it (v. 21), she then *let them down by a cord* over the city wall (v. 15), the situation of her house befriending them herein: thus Paul made his escape out of Damascus, 2 Cor. xi. 33. She also directed them which way to go for their own safety, being better acquainted with the country than they were,

r. 16. She directs them to leave the high road, and abscond in the mountains till the pursuers returned, for till then they could not safely venture over Jordan. Those that are in the way of God and their duty may expect that Providence will protect them, but this will not excuse them from taking all prudent methods for their own safety. God will keep us, but then we must not wilfully expose ourselves. Providence must be trusted, but not tempted. Calvin thinks that their charge to Rahab to keep this matter secret, and not to utter it, was intended for her safety, lest she, boasting of her security from the sword of Israel, should, before they came to protect her, fall into the hands of the king of Jericho and be put to death for treason: thus do they prudently advise her for her safety, as she advised them for theirs. And it is good advice, which we should at any time be thankful for, to *take heed to ourselves.*

22 And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought *them* throughout all the way, but found *them* not. 23 So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all *things* that befel them: 24 And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

We have here the safe return of the spies Joshua had sent, and the great encouragement they brought with them to Israel to proceed in their descent upon Canaan. Had they been disposed to discourage the people, as the evil spies did that Moses sent, they might have told them what they had observed of the height and strength of the walls of Jericho, and the extraordinary vigilance of the king of Jericho, and how narrowly they escaped out of his hands; but they were of another spirit, and, depending themselves upon the divine promise, they animated Joshua likewise. \* 1. Their return in safety was itself an encouragement to Joshua, and a token for good. That God provided for them so good a friend as Rahab was in an enemy's country, and that notwithstanding the rage of the king of Jericho and the eagerness of the pursuers they had come back in peace, was such an instance of God's great care concerning them for Israel's sake as might assure the people of the divine guidance and care they were under, which would undoubtedly make the progress of their arms glorious. He that so wonderfully protected their scouts would preserve their men of war,

and cover their heads in the day of battle. 2. The report they brought was much more encouraging (v. 24): "*All the inhabitants of the country, though resolved to stand it out, yet do faint because of us, they have neither wisdom to yield nor courage to fight,*" whence they conclude, "*Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land, it is all our own; we have nothing to do, in effect, but to take possession.*" Sinners' frights are sometimes sure presages of their fall. If we resist our spiritual enemies they will flee before us, which will encourage us to hope that in due time we shall be more than conquerors.

## CHAP. III.

This chapter, and that which follows it, give us the history of Israel's passing through Jordan into Canaan, and a very memorable history it is. Long afterwards, they are told to remember what God did for them between Shittim (whence they decamped, ver. 1) and Gilead, where they next pitched, chap. iv. 19, Mic. vi. 5, that they might know the righteousness of the Lord. By Joshua's order they marched up to the river's side (ver. 1), and then almighty power led them through it. They passed through the Red Sea unexpectedly, and in their flight by night, but they have notice some time before of their passing through Jordan, and their expectations raised. I. The people are directed to follow the ark, ver. 2-4. II. They are commanded to sanctify themselves, ver. 5. III. The priests with the ark are ordered to lead the van, ver. 6. IV. Joshua is magnified and made commander in chief, ver. 7, 8. V. Public notice is given of what God is about to do for them, ver. 9-13. VI. The thing is done, Jordan is divided, and Israel brought safely through it, ver. 14-17. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

AND Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. 2 And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; 3 And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. 4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed *this* way heretofore. 5 And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the LORD will do wonders among you. 6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

Rahab, in mentioning to the spies the *drying up of the Red Sea* (ch. ii. 10), the report of which terrified the Canaanites more than any thing else, intimates that those on that side the water expected that Jordan,

that great defence of their country, would in like manner give way to them. Whether the Israelites had any expectation of it does not appear. God often *did things for them which they looked not for*, Isa. lxiv. 3. Now here we are told,

I. That they *came to Jordan and lodged there*, v. 1. Though they were not yet told how they should pass the river, and were unprovided for the passing of it in any ordinary way, yet they went forward in faith, having been told (*ch. i. 11*) that they should pass it. We must go on in the way of our duty though we foresee difficulties, trusting God to help us through them when we come to them. Let us proceed as far as we can, and depend on divine sufficiency for that which we find ourselves not sufficient for. In this march Joshua led them, and particular notice is taken of his early rising, as there is afterwards upon other occasions (*ch. vi. 12; vii. 16; viii. 10*), which intimates how little he loved his ease, how much he loved his business, and what care and pains he was willing to take in it. Those that would bring great things to pass must rise early. *Lose not sleep, lest thou come to poverty*. Joshua herein set a good example to the officers under him, and taught them to rise early, and to all that are in public stations especially to attend continually to the duty of their place.

II. That the people were directed to follow the ark. Officers were appointed to go through the host to give these directions (*v. 2*), that every Israelite might know both what to do and what to depend upon.

1. They might depend upon the ark to lead them; that is, upon God himself, of whose presence the ark was an instituted sign and token. It seems, the pillar of cloud and fire was removed, else that would have led them, unless we suppose that it now hovered over the ark, and so they had a double guide: honour was put upon the ark, and a defence upon that glory. It is called here *the ark of the covenant of the Lord their God*. What greater encouragement could they have than this, that the Lord was their God, a God in covenant with them? Here was the *ark of the covenant*; if God be ours, we need not fear any evil. He was nigh to them, present with them, went before them: what could come amiss to those that were thus guided, thus guarded? Formerly the ark was carried in the midst of the camp, but now it went before them to *search out a resting-place* for them (*Num. x. 33*), and, as it were, to give them livery and seisin of the promised land, and put them in possession of it. In the ark the tables of the law were, and over it the mercy-seat; for the divine law and grace reigning in the heart are the surest pledges of God's presence and favour, and those that would be led to the heavenly Canaan must take the law of God for their guide (*if thou wilt enter into life keep the*

*commandments*) and have the great propitiation in their eye, *looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*.

2. They might depend upon the priests and Levites, who were appointed for that purpose to carry the ark before them. The work of ministers is to hold forth the word of life, and to take care of the administration of those ordinances which are the tokens of God's presence and the instruments of his power and grace; and herein they must go before the people of God in their way to heaven.

3. The people must follow the ark: *Remove from your place and go after it*, (1.) As those that are resolved never to forsake it. Wherever God's ordinances are, there we must be; if they flit, we must remove and go after them. (2.) As those that are entirely satisfied in its guidance, that it will lead in the best way to the best end; and therefore, *Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest*. This must be all their care, to attend the motions of the ark, and follow it with an implicit faith. Thus must we walk after the rule of the word and the direction of the Spirit in every thing, so shall *peace be upon us*, as it now was upon the Israel of God. They must follow the priests as far as they carried the ark, but no further; so we must follow our ministers only as they follow Christ.

4. In following the ark, they must *keep their distance*, v. 4. They must none of them come within a thousand yards of the ark. (1.) They must thus express their awful and reverent regard to that token of God's presence, lest its familiarity with them should breed contempt. This charge to them not to come near was agreeable to that dispensation of darkness, bondage, and terror: but we now through Christ have access with boldness. (2.) Thus it was made to appear that the ark was able to protect itself, and needed not to be guarded by the men of war, but was itself a guard to them. With what a noble defiance of the enemy did it leave all its friends half a mile behind except the unarmed priests that carried it, as perfectly sufficient for its own safety and theirs that followed it! (3.) Thus it was the better seen by those that were to be led by it: *That you may know the way by which you must go*, seeing it, as it were, chalked out or tracked by the ark. Had they been allowed to come near it, they would have surrounded it, and none would have had the sight of it but those that were close to it; but, as it was put at such a distance before them, they would all have the satisfaction of seeing it, and would be animated by the sight. And it was with good reason that this provision was made for their encouragement: *For you have not passed this way heretofore*. This had been the character of all their way through the wilderness, it was an untrodden path, but this especially through Jordan. While we



are here we must expect and prepare for unusual events, to pass ways that we have not passed before, and much more when we go hence; our way through the *valley of the shadow of death* is a way we have not gone before, which makes it the more formidable. But, if we have the assurance of God's presence, we need not fear; that will furnish us with such strength as we never had when we come to do a work we never did.

III. They were commanded to sanctify themselves, that they might be prepared to attend the ark; and with good reason: For *to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you, v. 5.* See how magnificently he speaks of God's works: he *doeth wonders*, and is therefore to be adored, admired, and trusted in. See how intimately acquainted Joshua was with the divine counsels: he could tell before-hand what God would do, and when. See what preparation we must make to receive the discoveries of God's glory and the communications of his grace: we must sanctify ourselves. This we must do when we are to attend the ark, and God by it is about to do wonders among us; we must separate ourselves from all other cares, devote ourselves to God's honour, and *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.* The people of Israel were now entering into the holy land, and therefore must sanctify themselves. God was about to give them uncommon instances of his favour, which by meditation and prayer they must compose their minds to a very careful observation of, that they might give God the glory, and take to themselves the comfort, of these appearances.

IV. The priests were ordered to take up the ark and carry it *before the people, v. 6.* It was the Levites' work ordinarily to carry the ark, Num. iv. 15. But on this great occasion the priests were ordered to do it. And they did as they were commanded, *took up the ark*, and did not think themselves disparaged, *went before the people*, and did not think themselves exposed; the ark they carried was both their honour and their defence. And now we may suppose that prayer of Moses used, when the ark set forward (Num. x. 35), *Rise up, Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered.* Magistrates are here instructed to stir up ministers to their work, and to make use of their authority for the furtherance of religion. Ministers must likewise learn to go before in the way of God, and not to shrink nor draw back when dangers are before them. They must expect to be most struck at, but they *know whom they have trusted.*

7 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8 And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant,

saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 9 And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. 10 And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. 12 Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap.

We may observe here how God honours Joshua, and by this wondrous work he is about to do designs to make Israel know that he is their governor, and then how Joshua honours God and endeavours by it to make Israel know that he is their God. Thus those that honour God he will honour, and those whom he has advanced should do what they can in their places to exalt him.

I. God speaks to Joshua to put honour upon him, v. 7, 8. 1. It was a great honour God did him that he spoke to him, as he had done to Moses from off the mercy-seat, before the priests removed it with the ark. This would make Joshua easy in himself and great among the people, that God was pleased to speak so familiarly to him. 2. That he designed to *magnify him in the sight of all Israel.* He had told him before that he would be with him (*ch. i. 5*), and that comforted him, but now all Israel shall see it, and this would magnify him. Those are truly great with whom God is and whom he employs and owns in his service. God magnified him because he would have the people magnify him. Pious magistrates are to be highly honoured and esteemed as public blessings, and the more we see of God with them the more we should honour them. By the dividing of the Red Sea Israel was convinced that God was with Moses in bringing them out of Egypt; therefore they are said to be *baptized unto Moses in the sea*, 1 Cor. x. 2. And upon that occasion they *believed him*, Exod. xiv. 31. And now, by the dividing of Jordan, they

shall be convinced that God is in like manner with Joshua in bringing them into Canaan. God had magnified Joshua before on several occasions, but now he began to magnify him as the successor of Moses in the government. Some have observed that it was at the banks of Jordan that God began to magnify Joshua, and at the same place he began to magnify our Lord Jesus as Mediator; for John was baptizing at Bethabara, *the house of passage*, and there it was that when our Saviour was baptized it was proclaimed concerning him, *This is my beloved Son*. 3. That by him he gave orders to the priests themselves, though they were his immediate attendants (v. 8): *Thou shalt command the priests*, that is, "thou shalt make known to them the divine command in this matter, and take care that they observe it, to stand still at the brink of Jordan while the waters part, that it may appear to be at the presence of the Lord, of the mighty God of Jacob, that Jordan is driven back," Ps. cxiv. 5, 7. God could have divided the river without the priests, but they could not without him. The priests must herein set a good example to the people, and teach them to do their utmost in the service of God, and trust him for help in time of need.

II. Joshua speaks to the people, and therein honours God.

1. He demands attention (v. 9): "*Come hither to me*, as many as can come within hearing, and, before you see the works, *hear the words of the Lord your God*, that you may compare them together and they may illustrate each other." He had commanded them to sanctify themselves, and therefore calls them to *hear the word of God*, for that is the ordinary means of sanctification, John xvii. 17.

2. He now tells them, at length, by what way they should pass over Jordan, by the stopping of its streams (v. 13): *The waters of Jordan shall be cut off*. God could by a sudden and miraculous frost have congealed the surface, so that they might all have gone over upon the ice; but that being a thing sometimes done even in that country, by the ordinary power of nature (Job. xxxviii. 30), it would not have been such an honour to Israel's God, nor such a terror to Israel's enemies; it must therefore be done in such a way as had no precedent but the dividing of the Red Sea: and that miracle is here repeated, to show that God has the same power to finish the salvation of his people that he had to begin it, for he is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*; and that *the word of the Lord* (as the Chaldee reads it, v. 7), the essential, eternal Word, was as truly with Joshua as he was with Moses. And by the dividing of the waters from the waters, and the making of the dry land to appear which had been covered, God would remind them of that in which Moses by revelation had instructed them concerning the work of creation (Gen. i. 6, 9), that by what they now saw their belief

of that which they there read might be assisted, and they might know that the God whom they worshipped was the same God that made the world and that it was the same power that was engaged and employed for them.

3. The people having been directed before to follow the ark are here told that it should *pass before them into Jordaa*, v. 11. Observe.

(1.) The ark of the covenant must be their guide. During the reign of Moses, the cloud was their guide, but now, in Joshua's reign, the ark; both were visible signs of God's presence and presidency, but divine grace under the Mosaic dispensation was wrapt up as in a cloud and covered with a veil, while by Christ, our Joshua, it is revealed in the ark of the covenant unveiled. (2.) It is called *the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*. "He that is your God (v. 9), in covenant with you, is the *Lord of all the earth*, has both right and power to command, control, use, and dispose of all nations and of all creatures. He is the *Lord of all the earth*, therefore he needs not you, nor can he be benefited by you; therefore it is your honour and happiness to have him in covenant with you: if he be yours, all the creatures are at your service, and when he pleases shall be employed for you." When we are praising and worshipping God as Israel's God, and ours through Christ, we must remember that he is the *Lord of the whole earth*, and reverence him and trust in him accordingly. Some observe an accent in the original, which they think directs us to translate it somewhat more emphatically, *Behold the ark of the covenant, even the ark of the Lord, or even of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*. (3.) They are told that the ark should *pass before them into Jordaa*. God would not appoint them to go any where but where he himself would go before them and go with them; and they might safely venture, even into Jordan itself, if the ark of the covenant led them. While we make God's precepts our rule, his promises our stay, and his providence our guide, we need not dread the greatest difficulties we may meet with in the way of duty. That promise is sure to all the seed (Isa. xliii. 2), *When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee*.

4. From what God was now about to do for them he infers an assurance of what he would yet further do. This he mentions first, so much was his heart upon it, and so great a satisfaction did it give him (v. 10) "*Hereby you shall know that the living God* (the true God, and God of power, not one of the dead gods of the heathen) *is among you*, though you see him not, nor are to have any image of him, is among you to give you law, secure your welfare, and receive your homage,—is among you in this great undertaking now before you; and therefore you shall, nay, he himself will, without fail, drive

out from before you the Canaanites." So that the dividing of Jordan was intended to be to them, (1.) A sure token of God's presence with them. By this they could not but know that God was among them, unless their unbelief was as obstinate against the most convincing evidence as that of their fathers was, who, presently after God had divided the Red Sea before them, impudently asked, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not?* Exod. xvii. 7. (2.) A sure pledge of the conquest of Canaan. If the living God is among you, *expelling he will expel* (so the Hebrew phrase is) *from before you the Canaanites.*" He will do it certainly, and do it effectually. What should hinder him? What can stand in his way before whom rivers are divided and dried up? The forcing of the lines was a certain presage of the ruin of all their hosts: how could they stand their ground when Jordan itself was driven back? When they had not courage to dispute this pass, but trembled at the approach of the *mighty God of Jacob* (Ps. cxiv. 7), what opposition could they ever make after this? This assurance which Joshua here gives them was so well grounded that it would enable one Israelite to chase a thousand Canaanites, and two to put ten thousand to flight; and it would be abundantly strengthened by remembering the song of Moses, dictated forty years before, which plainly foretold the dividing of Jordan and the influence it would have upon the driving out of the Canaanites. Exod. xv. 15—17, "*The inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away, and so he effectually driven out; they shall be as still as a stone till thy people pass over, and then thou shalt bring them in and plant them.*" Note, God's glorious appearances for his church and people ought to be improved by us for the encouragement of our faith and hope for the future. *As for God, his work is perfect.* If Jordan's flood cannot keep them out, Canaan's force cannot turn them out again.

5. He directs them to get twelve men ready, one of each tribe, who must be within call, to receive such orders as Joshua should afterwards give them, v. 12. It does not appear that they were to attend the priests, and walk with them when they carried the ark, that they might more immediately be witnesses of the wonders done by it, as some think; but they were to be at hand for the service they were called to, *ch. iv. 4, &c.*

14 And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; 15 And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest),

16 That the waters which came down from above stood *and* rose up upon a heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, *even* the salt sea, failed, *and* were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. 17 And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

Here we have a short and plain account of the dividing of the river Jordan, and the passage of the children of Israel through it. The story is not garnished with the flowers of rhetoric (gold needs not to be painted), but it tells us, in short, matter of fact.

I. That this river was now broader and deeper than usually it was at other times of the year, v. 15. The melting of the snow on the mountains of Lebanon, near which this river had its rise, was the occasion that at the time of harvest, barley-harvest, which was the spring of the year, Jordan overflowed all his banks. This great flood, just at that time (which Providence might have restrained for once, or which he might have ordered them to cross at another time of the year) very much magnified the power of God and his kindness to Israel. Note, Though the opposition given to the salvation of God's people have all imaginable advantages, yet God can and will conquer it. Let the banks of Jordan be filled to the brink, filled till they run over, it is as easy to Omnipotence to divide them, and dry them up, as if they were ever so narrow, ever so shallow; it is all one with the Lord.

II. That as soon as ever the feet of the priests dipped in the brim of the water the stream stopped immediately, as if a sluice had been let down to dam it up, v. 15, 16. So that the waters above swelled, stood on a heap, and ran back, and yet, as it should seem, did not spread, but congealed, which unaccountable rising of the river was observed with amazement by those that lived upward upon it many miles off, and the remembrance of it remained among them long after: the waters on the other side this invisible dam ran down of course, and left the bottom of the river dry as far downward, it is likely, as they swelled upward. When they passed through the Red Sea, the waters were a wall on either hand, here only on the right-hand. Note, The God of nature can, when he pleases, change the course of nature, and alter its properties, can turn fluids into solids, *waters into standing rocks*, as, on the contrary, *rocks into standing waters*, to serve his own purposes. See Ps. cxiv. 5, 8

What cannot God do? What will he not do for the perfecting of his people's salvation? Sometimes he *cleaves the earth with rivers* (Hab. iii. 9), and sometimes, as here, cleaves the rivers without earth. It is easy to imagine how, when the course of this strong and rapid stream was arrested on a sudden, *the waters roared and were troubled*, so that the mountains seemed to *shake with the swelling thereof* (Ps. xlv. 3), *how the floods lifted up their voice, the floods lifted up their waves*, while the Lord on high showed himself *mightier than the noise of these many waters*, Ps. xciii. 3, 4. With reference to this the prophet asks, *Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers?* Hab. iii. 8. No, *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people*, v. 13. In allusion to this, it is foretold, among the great things God will do for the gospel church in the latter days, that the great river Euphrates shall be dried up, *that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared*, Rev. xvi. 12. When the time has come for Israel's entrance into the land of promise all difficulties shall be conquered, *mountains shall become plains* (Zech. iv. 7) and rivers become dry, for the *ransomed of the Lord to pass over*. When we have finished our pilgrimage through this wilderness, death will be like this Jordan between us and the heavenly Canaan, but the ark of the covenant has prepared us a way through it; it is the last enemy that shall be destroyed.

III. That the people passed over right against Jericho, which was, 1. An instance of their boldness, and a noble defiance of their enemies. Jericho was one of the strongest cities, and yet they dared to face it at their first entrance. 2. It was an encouragement to them to venture through Jordan, for Jericho was a goodly city and the country about it extremely pleasant; and, having that in view as their own, what difficulties could discourage them from taking possession? 3. It would increase the confusion and terror of their enemies, who no doubt strictly observed their motions, and were the amazed spectators of this work of wonders.

IV. That the priests stood still in the midst of Jordan while all the people passed over, v. 17. There the ark was appointed to be, to show that the same power that parted the waters kept them parted as long as there was occasion; and had not the divine presence, of which the ark was a token, been their security, the waters would have returned upon them and buried them. There the priests were appointed to stand still, 1. To try their faith, whether they could venture to take their post, when God assigned it to them, with mountains of water over their heads. As they made a bold step when they set the first foot into Jordan, so now they made a bold stand when they tarried longest in Jordan; but they knew they carried their own protection with them. Note. Ministers in times

of peril should be examples of courage and confidence in the divine goodness. 2. It was to encourage the faith of the people, that they might go triumphantly into Canaan, and *fear no evil*, no, not in this *valley of the shadow of death* (for so the divided river was), being assured of God's presence, which interposed between them and the greatest danger, between them and the proud waters, which otherwise had gone over their souls. Thus in the greatest dangers the saints are comforted with *his rod and his staff*, Ps. xxiii. 4.

#### CHAP. IV.

This chapter gives a further account of the miraculous passage of Israel through Jordan. 1. The provision that was made at that time to preserve the memorial of it, by twelve stones set up in Jordan (ver. 9) and other twelve stones taken up out of Jordan, ver. 1—8. 11. The march of the people through Jordan's channel, the two tribes first, then all the people, and the priests that bore the ark last, ver. 10—14. 111. The closing of the waters again upon their coming up with the ark, ver. 15—19. IV. The erecting of the monument in Gilgal, to preserve the remembrance of this work of wonder to posterity, ver. 20—24.

AND it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, 2 Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, 3 And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: 5 And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: 6 That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask *their fathers* in time to come, saying, What *mean* ye by these stones? 7 Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever. 8 And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and

carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. 9 And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day.

We may well imagine how busy Joshua and all the men of war were while they were passing over Jordan, when besides their own marching into an enemy's country, and in the face of the enemy, which could not but occasion them many thoughts of heart, they had their wives, and children, and families, their cattle, and tents, and all their effects, bag and baggage, to convey by this strange and untrodden path, which we must suppose either very muddy or very stony, troublesome to the weak and frightful to the timorous, the descent to the bottom of the river and the ascent out of it steep, so that every man must needs have his head full of care and his hands full of business, and Joshua more than any of them. And yet, in the midst of all his hurry, care must be taken to perpetuate the memorial of this wondrous work of God, and this care might not be adjourned to a time of greater leisure. Note, How much soever we have to do of business for ourselves and our families, we must not neglect nor omit what we have to do for the glory of God and the serving of his honour, for that is our best business. Now,

I. God gave orders for the preparing of this memorial. Had Joshua done it without divine direction, it might have looked like a design to perpetuate his own name and honour, nor would it have commanded so sacred and venerable a regard from posterity as now, when God himself appointed it. Note, God's works of wonder ought to be kept in everlasting remembrance, and means devised for the preserving of the memorial of them. Some of the Israelites that passed over Jordan perhaps were so stupid, and so little affected with this great favour of God to them, that they felt no concern to have it remembered; while others, it may be, were so much affected with it, and had such deep impressions made upon them by it, that they thought there needed no memorial of it to be erected, the heart and tongue of every Israelite in every age would be a living lasting monument of it. But God, knowing their frame, and how apt they had been soon to forget his works, ordered an expedient for the keeping of this in remembrance to all generations, that those who could not, or would not, read the record of it in the sacred history, might come to the knowledge of it by the monument set up in remembrance of it, of which the common tradition of the country would be an explication; it would likewise serve to corroborate the proof of the

matter of fact, and would remain a standing evidence of it to those who in after-ages might question the truth of it. A monument is to be erected, and, 1. Joshua, as chief captain, must give directions about it (v. 1): *When all the people had clean passed over Jordan, not even the feeble, that were the hindmost of them, left behind, so that God had done his work completely, and every Israelite got safe into Canaan, then God spoke unto Joshua to provide materials for this monument.* It is the pious conjecture of the learned bishop Patrick that Joshua had gone into some place of retirement to return thanks immediately for this wonderful mercy, and then God met him, and spoke thus to him. Or, perhaps, it was by Eleazar the priest that God gave these and other instructions to Joshua; for, though he is not mentioned here, yet, when Joshua was ordained by the imposition of hands to this great trust, God appointed that Eleazar should *ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim, and at his word Joshua and all the children of Israel must go out and come in*, Num. xxvii. 21. 2. One man out of each tribe, and he a chosen man, must be employed to prepare materials for this monument, that each tribe might have the story told them by one of themselves, and each tribe might contribute something to the glory of God thereby (v. 2, 4): *Out of every tribe a man.* Not the Levites only, but every Israelite must, in his place, help to *make known to the sons of men God's mighty acts*, Ps. cxlv. 12. The two tribes, though seated already in their possession, yet, sharing in the mercy, must lend a hand to the memorial of it. 3. The stones that must be set up for this memorial are ordered to be taken out of the midst of the channel (where, probably, there lay abundance of great stones), and as near as might be from the very place where the priests stood *with the ark*, v. 3, 5. This intended monument deserved to be made of stones curiously cut with the finest and most exquisite art, but these stones out of the bottom of the river were more natural and more apt indications of the miracle. Let posterity know by this that Jordan was driven back, for these very stones were then fetched out of it. In the institution of signs, God always chose that which was most proper and significant, rather than that which is pompous or curious; for *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world.* These twelve men, after they got over Jordan, must be sent back to the place where the ark stood, being permitted to come near it (which others might not) for this service: "*Pass over before the ark* (v. 5), that is, into the presence of the ark, which now stands in the midst of Jordan, and thence fetch these stones." 4. The use of these stones is here appointed for a sign (v. 6), a memorial, v. 7. They would give occasion to the children to ask their parents in time to come, *How came these stones hither?* (probably the land about not being

stony), and then the parents would inform them, as they themselves had been informed, that in this place Jordan was divided by the almighty power of God, to give Israel passage into Canaan, as Joshua enlarges on this head, v. 22, &c.

II. According to these orders the thing was done. 1. Twelve stones were taken up out of the midst of Jordan, and carried in the sight of the people to the place where they had their head-quarters that night, v. 8. It is probable that the stones they took were as big as they could well carry, and as near as might be of a size and shape. But whether they went away with them immediately to the place, or whether they staid to attend the ark, and kept pace with the solemn procession of that, to grace its triumphant entry into Canaan, is not certain. By these stones which they were ordered to take up God did, as it were, give them livery and seisin of this good land; it is all their own, let them enter and take possession; therefore what these twelve did the children of Israel are said to do (v. 8), because they were the representatives of their respective tribes. In allusion to this, we may observe that when the Lord Jesus, our Joshua, having overcome the sharpness of death and dried up that Jordan, had opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, he appointed his twelve apostles according to the number of the tribes of Israel, by the memorial of the gospel to transmit the knowledge of this to remote places and future ages. 2. Other twelve stones (probably much larger than the other, for we read not that they were each of them one man's load) were set up *in the midst of Jordan* (v. 9), piled up so high in a heap or pillar as that the top of it might be seen above water when the river was low, or seen in the water when it was clear, or at least the noise or commotion of the water passing over it would be observable, and the bargemen would avoid it, as they do a rock. Some way or other, it is likely, it was discernible, so as to notify the very place where the ark stood, and to serve for a duplicate to the other monument, which was to be set up on dry land in Gilgal, for the confirming of its testimony and the preserving of its tradition. The sign being doubled, no doubt the thing was certain.

10 For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hasted and passed over. 11 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the

people. 12 And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: 13 About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14 On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. 15 And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, 16 Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. 17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. 18 And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as *they did* before. 19 And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho.

The inspired historian seems to be so well pleased with his subject here that he is loth to quit it, and is therefore very particular in his narrative, especially in observing how closely Joshua pursued the orders God gave him, and that he did nothing without divine direction, finishing all that *the Lord had commanded* him (v. 10), which is also said to be what *Moses commanded*. We read not of any particular commands that Moses gave to Joshua about this matter: the thing was altogether new to him. It must therefore be understood of the general instructions Moses had given him to follow the divine direction, to deliver that to the people which he had *received of the Lord*, and to take all occasions to remind them of their duty to God, as the best return for his favours to them. This which Moses, who was now dead and gone, had said to him, he had in mind at this time, and *did accordingly*. It is well for us to have the good instructions that have been given us ready to us when we have occasion for them.

1. *The people hasted and passed over*, v. 10. Some understand this of the twelve men that carried the stones, but it seems rather to be meant of the body of the people; for, though an account was given of their passing over (v. 1), yet here it is repeated for the sake of this circumstance, which was to

be added, that they passed over *in haste*, either because Joshua by their officers ordered them to make haste, for it was to be but one day's work and they must not *leave a hoof behind*, or perhaps it was their own inclination that hastened them. 1. Some hastened because they were not able to trust God. They were afraid the waters should return upon them, being conscious of guilt, and diffident of the divine power and goodness. 2. Others because they were not willing to tempt God to continue the miracle longer than needs must, nor would they put the patience of the priests that bore the ark too much to the stretch by unnecessary delay. 3. Others because they were eager to be in Canaan, and would thus show how much they longed after that pleasant land. 4. Those that considered least, yet hastened because others did. He that believeth doth not make haste to *anticipate* God's counsels, but he makes haste to *attend* them, Isa. xxviii. 16.

II. The two tribes and a half led the van, v. 12, 13. So they had promised when they had their lot given them on that side Jordan, Num. xxxii. 27. And Joshua had lately reminded them of their promise, *ch. i. 12—15*. It was fit that those who had the first settlement should be the first in the encounter of difficulties, the rather because they had not the incumbrance of families with them as the other tribes had, and they were all chosen men, and fit for service, ready armed. It was a good providence that they had so strong a body to lead them on, and would be an encouragement to the rest. And the two tribes had no reason to complain: the post of danger is the post of honour.

III. When all the people had got clear to the other side, the priests with the ark came up out of Jordan. This, one would think, should have been done of course; their own reason would tell them that now there was no more occasion for them, and yet they did not stir a step till Joshua ordered them to move, and Joshua did not order them out of Jordan till God directed him to do so, v. 15—17. So observant were they of Joshua, and he of God, which was their praise, as it was their happiness to be under such good direction. How low a condition soever God may at any time bring his priests or people to, let them patiently wait, till by his providence he shall call them up out of it, as the priests here were called to come up out of Jordan, and let them not be weary of waiting, while they have the tokens of God's presence with them, even the ark of the covenant, in the depth of their adversity.

IV. As soon as ever the priests and the ark had come up out of Jordan, the waters of the river, which had stood on a heap, gradually flowed down according to their nature and usual course, and soon filled the channel again, v. 18. This makes it yet more evident that the stop which had now been given

to the river was not from any secret natural cause, but purely from the power of God's presence, and for the sake of his Israel; for when Israel's turn was served, and the token of God's presence was removed, immediately the water went forward again; so that if it be asked, *What ailed thee, O Jordan! that thou wast driven back?* It must be answered. It was purely in obedience to the God of Israel, and in kindness to the Israel of God. There is therefore none *like unto the God of Jeshurun*; happy also art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people? Some observe here, by way of allusion, that when the ark, and the priests that bore it, are removed from any place, the flood-gates are drawn up, the defence has departed, and an inundation of judgments is to be expected shortly. Those that are unchurched will soon be undone. The glory has departed if the ark is taken.

V. Notice is taken of the honour put upon Joshua by all this (v. 14): *On that day the Lord magnified Joshua*, both by the fellowship he admitted him to with himself, speaking to him upon all occasions and being ready to be consulted by him, and by the authority he confirmed him in over both priests and people. Those that honour God he will honour, and when he will magnify a man, as he had said he would magnify Joshua (*ch. iii. 7*), he will do it effectually. Yet it was not for Joshua's sake only that he was thus magnified, but to put him in a capacity of doing so much the more service to Israel, for hereupon they feared him as they feared Moses. See here what is the best and surest way to command the respect of inferiors, and to gain their reverence and observance, not by blustering and threatening, and carrying it with a high hand, but by holiness and love, and all possible indications of a constant regard to their welfare, and to God's will and honour. Those are feared in the best manner, and to the best purpose, who make it to appear that God is with them, and that they set him before them. Those that are sanctified are truly magnified, and are worthy of double honour. Favourites of heaven should be looked on with awe.

VI. An account is kept of the time of this great event (v. 19): it was *on the tenth day of the first month*, just forty years since they came out of Egypt, wanting five days. God had said in his wrath that they should wander forty years in the wilderness, but, to make up that forty, we must take in the first year, which was then past, and had been a year of triumph in their deliverance out of Egypt, and this last, which had been a year of triumph likewise on the other side Jordan, so that all the forty were not years of sorrow; and at last he brought them into Canaan five days before the forty years were ended, to show how little pleasure God takes in punishing, how swift he is to show mercy, and that *for the elects' sake the days of trouble are shortened*, Matt. xxiv. 22. God ordered it so

that they should enter Canaan four days before the annual solemnity of the passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was to begin (Exod. xii. 3), because he would have their entrance into Canaan graced and sanctified with that religious feast, and would have them then to be reminded of their deliverance out of Egypt, that, comparing them together, God might be glorified as the *Alpha* and *Omega* of their bliss.

20 And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. 21 And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? 22 Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. 23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: 24 That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

The twelve stones which were laid down in Gilgal (v. 8) are here set up either one upon another, yet so as that they might be distinctly counted, or one by another in rows; for after they were fixed they are not called a heap of stones, but these stones.

I. It is here taken for granted that posterity would enquire into the meaning of them, supposing them intended for a memorial: *Your children shall ask their fathers* (for who else should they ask?) *What mean these stones?* Note, Those that will be wise when they are old must be inquisitive when they are young. Our Lord Jesus, though he had in himself the fulness of knowledge, has by his example taught children and young people to hear and ask questions, Luke ii. 46. Perhaps when John was baptizing in Jordan at Bethabara (the house of passage, where the people passed over) he pointed at these very stones, while saying (Matt. iii. 9) *God is able of these stones* (which were at first set up by the twelve tribes) *to raise up children unto Abraham.* The stones being the memorial of the miracle, the children's question gave occasion for the improvement of it; but our Saviour says (Luke x. 40), *If the children should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out*; for one way or other the Lord will be glorified in his works of wonder.

II. The parents are here directed what answer to give to this enquiry (v. 22): *"You shall let your children know that which you*

have yourselves learned from the written word and from your fathers." Note, It is the duty of parents to acquaint their children betimes with the word and works of God, that they may be trained up in the way they should go.

1. They must let their children know that Jordan was driven back before Israel, who went through it upon dry land, and that this was the very place where they passed over. They saw how deep and strong a stream Jordan now was, but the divine power put a stop to it, even when it overflowed all its banks—"and this for you, that live so long after." Note, God's mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us; and we should take all occasions to revive the remembrance of the great things God did for our fathers in the days of old. The place thus marked would be a memorandum to them: Israel came over this Jordan. A local memory would be of use to them, and the sight of the place remind them of that which was done there; and not only the inhabitants of that country, but strangers and travellers, would look upon these stones and receive instruction. Many, upon the sight of the stones, would go to their Bibles, and there read the history of this wonderful work; and some perhaps, upon reading the history, though living at a distance, would have the curiosity to go and see the stones.

2. They must take that occasion to tell their children of the drying up of the Red Sea forty years before: *As the Lord your God did to the Red Sea.* Note, (1.) It greatly magnifies later mercies to compare them with former mercies, for, by making the comparison, it appears that God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. (2.) Later mercies should bring to remembrance former mercies, and revive our thankfulness for them.

3. They must put them in the way of making a good use of these works of wonder, the knowledge whereof was thus carefully transmitted to them, v. 24. (1.) The power of God was hereby magnified. All the world was or might be convinced that *the hand of the Lord is mighty*, that nothing is too hard for God to do; nor can any power, no, not that of nature itself, obstruct what God will effect. The deliverances of God's people are instructions to all people, and fair warnings not to contend with Omnipotence. (2.) The people of God were engaged and encouraged to persevere in his service. *"That you might fear the Lord your God, and consequently do your duty to him, and this for ever,"* or *all days (margin),* "every day, all the days of your lives, and your seed throughout your generations." The remembrance of this wonderful work should effectually restrain them from the worship of other gods, and constrain them to abide and abound in the service of their own God. Note, In all the instructions and informations parents give their children, they should have this



chiefly in their eye, to teach and engage them to fear God for ever. Serious godliness is the best learning.

## CHAP. V.

Israel have now got over Jordan, and the waters which had opened before them, to favour their march forward, are closed again behind them, to forbid their retreat backward. They have now got footing in Canaan, and must apply themselves to the conquest of it, in order to which this chapter tells us, 1. How their enemies were dispirited, ver. 1. 2. What was done at their first landing to assist and encourage them. 1. The covenant of circumcision was renewed, ver. 2—9. 2. The feast of the passover was celebrated, ver. 10. 3. Their camp was victualled with the corn of the land, whereupon the manna ceased, ver. 11, 12. 4. The captain of the Lord's host himself appeared to Joshua to animate and direct him, ver. 13—15.

AND it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel. 2 At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. 3 And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. 4 And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. 5 Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not show them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. 7 And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. 8 And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all

the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. 9 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.

A vast show, no doubt, the numerous camp of Israel made in the plains of Jericho, where now they had pitched their tents. *Who can count the dust of Jacob? That which had long been the church in the wilderness has now come up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved, and looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.* How terrible she was in the eyes of her enemies we are here told, v. 1. How fair and clear she was made in the eyes of her friends, by the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt, we are told in the following verses.

1. Here is the fright which the Canaanites were put into by their miraculously passing over Jordan, v. 1. The news of it was soon dispersed all the country over, not only as a prodigy in itself, but as an alarm to all the kings and kingdoms of Canaan. Now, as when Babylon was taken, *One post runs to meet another, and one messenger to meet another*, to carry the amazing tidings to every corner of their land, Jer. li. 31. And here we are told what impressions the tidings made upon the kings of this land: *Their heart melted like wax before the fire, neither was there spirit in them any more.* This intimates that, though the heart of the people generally had fainted before (as Rahab owned, ch. ii. 9), yet the kings had till now kept up their spirits pretty well, had promised themselves that, being in possession, their country populous, and their cities fortified, they should be able to make their part good against the invaders; but when they heard not only that they had come over Jordan, and that this defence of their country was broken through, but that they had come over by a miracle, the God of nature manifestly fighting for them, *their hearts failed them too*, they gave up the cause for gone, and were now at their wits' end. And, 1. They had reason enough to be afraid; Israel itself was a formidable body, and much more so when God was its head, a God of almighty power. What can make head against them if Jordan be driven back before them? 2. God impressed these fears upon them, and dispirited them, as he had promised (Exod. xxiii. 27), *I will send my fear before thee.* God can make the wicked to fear where no fear is (Ps. liii. 5), much more where there is such cause for fear as was here. He that made the soul can, when he pleases, make his sword thus to approach to it and kill it with his terrors.

11. The opportunity which this gave to the Israelites to circumcise those among them

that were uncircumcised: *At that time* (c. 2), when the country about them was in that great consternation, God ordered Joshua to circumcise the children of Israel, for at that time it might be done with safety even in an enemy's country; their hearts being melted, their hands were tied, that they could not take this advantage against them as Simeon and Levi did against the Shechemites, to come upon them *when they were sore*. Joshua could not be sure of this, and therefore, if he had ordered this general circumcision just at this time of his own head, he might justly have been censured as imprudent; for, how good soever the thing was in itself, in the eye of reason it was not seasonable at this time, and might have been of dangerous consequence; but, when God commanded him to do it, he must not *consult with flesh and blood*: he that bade them to do it would, no doubt, protect them and bear them out in it. Now observe,

1. The occasion there was for this general circumcision. (1.) All that came out of Egypt were circumcised, v. 5. While they had peace in Egypt doubtless they circumcised their children the eighth day according to the law. But after they began to be oppressed, especially when the edict was made for the destruction of their male infants, the administration of this ordinance was interrupted; many of them were uncircumcised, of whom there was a general circumcision, either during the time of the three days' darkness, as Dr. Lightfoot conjectures, or a year after, just before their eating the second passover at Mount Sinai, and in order to that solemnity (Num. ix. 2) as many think. And it is with reference to that general circumcision that this is called a *second*, v. 2. But the learned Masius thinks it refers to the general circumcision of Abraham's family when that ordinance was first instituted, Gen. xvii. 23. That first confirmed the promise of the land of Canaan, this second was a thankful celebration of the performance of that promise. But, (2.) All that were *born in the wilderness*, namely, after their walking in the wilderness, became by the divine sentence a judgment upon them for their disobedience, as is intimated by that repetition of the sentence, v. 6. All that were born since that fatal day on which God swore in his wrath that none of that generation should *enter into his rest* were uncircumcised. But what shall we say to this? Had not God enjoined it to Abraham, under a very severe penalty, that every man-child of his seed should be circumcised on the eighth day? Gen. xvii. 9—14. Was it not the seal of the everlasting covenant? Was not so great a stress laid upon it when they were coming out of Egypt that when, immediately after the first passover, the law concerning that feast was made perpetual, this was one clause of it, that no uncircumcised person should eat of it, but should be deemed as a stranger? and yet, under the

government of Moses himself, to have all their children that were born for thirty-eight years together left uncircumcised is unaccountable. So great an omission could not be general but by divine direction. Now, [1.] Some think circumcision was omitted because it was needless: it was appointed to be a mark of distinction between the Israelites and other nations, and therefore in the wilderness, where they were so perfectly separated from all and mingled with none, there was no occasion for it. [2.] Others think that they did not look upon the precept of circumcision as obligatory till they came to settle in Canaan; for in the covenant made with them at Mount Sinai nothing was said about circumcision, neither was it of Moses but *of the fathers* (John vii. 22), and with particular reference to the grant of the land of Canaan, Gen. xvii. 8. [3.] Others think that God favourably dispensed with the observance of this ordinance in consideration of the unsettledness of their state, and their frequent removals while they were in the wilderness. It was requisite that children after they were circumcised should rest for some time while they were sore, and stirring them might be dangerous to them; God therefore would have mercy and not sacrifice. This reason is generally acquiesced in, but to me it is not satisfactory, for sometimes they staid a year in a place (Num. ix. 22), if not much longer; and in their removals the little children, though sore, might be wrapped so warm, and carried so easy, as to receive no damage, and might certainly be much better accommodated than the mothers in travail or while lying in. Therefore, [4.] To me it seems to have been a continued token of God's displeasure against them for their unbelief and murmuring. Circumcision was originally a seal of the promise of the land of Canaan, as we observed before. It was in the believing hope of that good land that the patriarchs circumcised their children; but when God had *sworn in his wrath* concerning the men of war who came out of Egypt that they should be consumed in the wilderness, and never enter Canaan, nor come within sight of it (as that sentence is here repeated, v. 6, reference being made to it), as a further ratification of that sentence, and to be a constant memorandum of it to them, all that fell under that sentence, and were to fall by it, were forbidden to circumcise their children, by which they were plainly told that, whatever others might, they should never have the benefit of that promise of which circumcision was the seal. And this was such a significant indication of God's wrath as the breaking of the tables of the covenant was when Israel had broken the covenant by making the golden calf. It is true that there is no express mention of this judicial prohibition in the account of that sentence; but an intimation of it in Num. xiv. 33, *Your children shall bear your whoredoms*. It is probable the children

of Caleb and Joshua were circumcised, for they were excepted out of that sentence, and of Caleb it is particularly said, *To him will I give the land, and to his children* (Deut. i. 36), which was the very promise that circumcision was the seal of: and Joshua is here told to circumcise the people, not his own family. Whatever the reason was, it seems that this great ordinance was omitted in Israel for almost forty years together, which is a plain indication that it was not of absolute necessity, nor was to be of perpetual obligation, but should in the fulness of time be abolished, as now it was for so long a time suspended.

2. The orders given to Joshua for this general circumcision (v. 2): *Circumcise again the children of Israel*, not the same persons, but the body of the people. Why was this ordered to be done now? Answ. (1.) Because now the promise of which circumcision was instituted to be the seal was performed. The seed of Israel was brought safely into the land of Canaan. "Let them therefore hereby own the truth of that promise which their fathers had disbelieved, and could not find in their hearts to trust to." (2.) Because now the threatening of which the suspending of circumcision for thirty-eight years was the ratification was fully executed by the expiring of the forty years. *That warfare is accomplished, that iniquity is pardoned* (Isa. xl. 2), and therefore now the seal of the covenant is revived again. But why was it not done sooner? why not while they were resting some months in the plains of Moab? why not during the thirty days of their mourning for Moses? Why was it not deferred longer, till they had made some progress in the conquest of Canaan, and had gained a settlement there, at least till they had entrenched themselves, and fortified their camp? Why must it be done the very next day after they had come over Jordan? Answ. Because divine Wisdom saw that to be the fittest time, just when the forty years were ended, and they had entered Canaan; and the reasons which human wisdom would have offered against it were easily overruled. [1.] God would hereby show that the camp of Israel was not governed by the ordinary rules and measures of war, but by immediate direction from God, who by thus exposing them, in the most dangerous moments, magnified his own power in protecting them even then. And this great instance of security, in disabling themselves for action just when they were entering upon action, proclaimed such confidence in the divine care for their safety as would increase their enemies' fears, much more when their scouts informed them not only of the thing itself that was done, but of the meaning of it, that it was a seal of the grant of this land to Israel. [2.] God would hereby animate his people Israel against the difficulties they were now to encounter, by confirming his covenant with them, which

gave them unquestionable assurance of victory and success, and the full possession of the land of promise. [3.] God would hereby teach them, and us with them, in all great undertakings to *begin with God*, to make sure of his favour, by offering ourselves to him a *living sacrifice* (for that was signified by the blood of circumcision), and then we may expect to prosper in all we do. [4.] The reviving of circumcision, after it had been so long disused, was designed to revive the observance of other institutions, the omission of which had been connived at in the wilderness. This command to circumcise them was to remind them of that which Moses had told them (Deut. xii. 8), that when they should have come over Jordan they must not do as they had done *in the wilderness*, but must come under a stricter discipline. It was said concerning many of the laws God had given them that they must observe them *in the land* to which they were going, Deut. vi. 1; xii. 1. [5.] This *second* circumcision, as it is here called, was typical of the spiritual circumcision with which the Israel of God, when they enter into the gospel rest, are circumcised; it is the learned bishop Pierson's observation that this circumcision being performed under the direction of Joshua, Moses's successor, it points to *Jesus as the true circumciser*, the author of *another circumcision* than that of the *flesh*, commanded by the law, even the *circumcision of the heart* (Rom. ii. 29), called the *circumcision of Christ*, Col. ii. 11.

3. The people's obedience to these orders. Joshua *circumcised the children of Israel* (v. 3), not himself with his own hands, but he commanded that it should be done, and took care that it was done: it might soon be despatched, for it was not necessary that it should be done by a priest or Levite, but any one might be employed to do it. All those that were under twenty years old when the people were numbered at Mount Sinai, and not being numbered with them fell not by the fatal sentence, were circumcised, and by them all the rest might be circumcised in a little time. The people had promised to hearken to Joshua as they had hearkened to Moses (ch. i. 17), and here they gave an instance of their dutifulness by submitting to this painful institution, and not calling him for the sake of it a bloody governor, as Zipporah because of the circumcision called Moses a bloody husband.

4. The names given to the place where this was done, to perpetuate the memory of it. (1.) It was called *the hill of the foreskins*, v. 3. Probably the foreskins that were cut off were laid on a heap, and covered with earth, so that they made a little hillock. (2.) It was called *Gilgal*, from a word which signifies to take away, from that which God said to Joshua (v. 9), *This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt*. God is jealous for the honour of his people, his own honour

being so much interested in it; and, whatever reproach they may lie under for a time, first or last it will certainly be rolled away, and every tongue that riseth up against them he will condemn [1.] Their circumcision rolled away the reproach of Egypt. They were hereby owned to be the free-born children of God, having the seal of the covenant in their flesh, and so the reproach of their bondage in Egypt was removed. They were tainted with the idolatry of Egypt, and that was their reproach; but now that they were circumcised it was to be hoped they would be so entirely devoted to God that the reproach of their affection to Egypt would be rolled away. [2.] Their coming safely to Canaan rolled away the reproach of Egypt, for it silenced that spiteful suggestion of the Egyptians, that *for mischief they were brought out, the wilderness had shat them in*, Exod. xiv. 3. Their wandering so long in the wilderness confirmed the reproach, but now that they had entered Canaan in triumph that reproach was done away. When God glorifies himself in perfecting the salvation of his people he not only silences the reproach of their enemies, but rolls it upon themselves.

10 And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. 11 And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched *corn* in the selfsame day. 12 And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

We may well imagine that the people of Canaan were astonished, and that when they observed the motions of the enemy they could not but think them very strange. When soldiers take the field they are apt to think themselves excused from religious exercises (they have not time nor thought to attend to them), yet Joshua opens the campaign with one act of devotion after another. What was afterwards said to another Joshua might truly be said to this, *Hear now, O Joshua! thou and thy fellows that sit before thee are men wandered at* (Zech. iii. 8), and yet indeed he took the right method. That is likely to end well which begins with God. Here is,

1. A solemn passover kept, at the time appointed by the law, *the fourteenth day of the first month*, and in the same place where they were circumcised, *v. 10*. While they were wandering in the wilderness they were denied the benefit and comfort of this ordi-

nance, as a further token of God's displeasure; but now, in answer to the prayer of Moses upon the passing of that sentence Ps. xc. 15, God comforted them again, after the time that he had afflicted them, and therefore now that joyful ordinance is revived again. Now that they had entered into Canaan it was very reasonable to remember those wondrous works of divine power and goodness by which they were brought out of Egypt. The finishing of mercies should bring to mind the beginning of them; and when it is perfect day we must not forget how welcome the morning-light was when we had long waited for it. The solemn passover followed immediately after the solemn circumcision; thus, when those that received the word were baptized, immediately we find them *breaking bread*, Acts ii. 41, 42. They kept this passover in the plains of Jericho, as it were in defiance of the Canaanites that were round about them and enraged against them, and yet could not give them any disturbance. Thus God gave them an early instance of the performance of that promise that when they went up to keep the feasts their land should be taken under the special protection of the divine Providence. Exod. xxxiv. 24, *Neither shall any man desire thy land*. He now prepared a table before them in the presence of their enemies, Ps. xxiii. 5.

11. Provision made for their camp of the *corn of the land*, and the ceasing of the manna thereupon, *v. 11, 12*. Manna was a wonderful mercy to them when they needed it. But it was the mark of a wilderness state; it was the food of children; and therefore, though it was angel's food, and not to be complained of as light bread, yet it would be more acceptable to them to eat of the *corn of the land*, and this they are now furnished with.

1. The country people, having retired for safety into Jericho, had left their barns and fields, and all that was in them, which served for the subsistence of this great army. And the supply came very seasonably, for, (1.) After the passover they were to keep *the feast of unleavened bread*, which they could not do according to the appointment when they had nothing but manna to live upon; and perhaps this was one reason why it was intermitted in the wilderness. But now they found old corn enough in the barns of the Canaanites to supply them plentifully for that occasion; thus *the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, and little did those who laid it up think *whose all these things should be which they had provided*. (2.) On the morrow after the passover-sabbath they were to *wave the sheaf of first-fruits before the Lord*, Lev. xxiii. 10, 11. And this they were particularly ordered to do when they came into the land which God would give them: and they were furnished for this with *the fruit of the land that year* (*v. 12*), which

was then growing and beginning to be ripe. Thus they were well provided for, both with *old and new corn, as good householders*. See Matt. xiii. 52. And as soon as ever the fruits of this good land came to their hands they had an opportunity of honouring God with them, and employing them in his service according to his appointment. And thus, *behold, all things were clean* and comfortable to them. Calvin is of opinion that they had kept the passover every year in its season during their wandering in the wilderness, though it is not mentioned, and that God dispensed with their being uncircumcised, as he did, notwithstanding that, admit them to offer other sacrifices. But some gather from Amos v. 25 that after the sentence passed upon them there were no sacrifices offered till they came to Canaan, and consequently no passover was kept. And it is observable that after that sentence (Num. xiv.) the law which follows (Num. xv.) concerning sacrifices begins thus: "*When you shall have come into the land of your habitations*" you shall do so and so.

2. Notice is taken of the ceasing of the manna as soon as ever they had eaten the *old corn of the land*, (1.) To show that it did not come by chance or common providence, as snow or hail does, but by the special designation of divine wisdom and goodness; for, as it came just when they needed it, so it continued as long as they had occasion for it and no longer. (2.) To teach us not to expect extraordinary supplies when supplies may be had in an ordinary way. If God had dealt with Israel according to their deserts, the manna would have ceased when they called it light bread; but as long as they needed it God continued it, though they despised it; and now that they needed it not God withdrew it, though perhaps some of them desired it. He is a wise Father, who knows the necessities of his children, and accommodates his gifts to them, not to their humours. The word and ordinances of God are spiritual manna, with which God nourishes his people in this wilderness, and, though often forfeited, yet they are continued while we are here; but when we come to the heavenly Canaan this manna will cease, for we shall no longer have need of it.

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, *Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?* 14 And he said, Nay; but *as captain of the host of the Lord* am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What

saith my lord unto his servant? 15 And the captain of the **LORD'S** host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

We have hitherto found God often speaking to Joshua, but we read not till now of any appearance of God's glory to him; now that his difficulties increased his encouragements were increased in proportion. Observe,

I. The time when he was favoured with this vision. It was immediately after he had performed the great solemnities of circumcision and the passover; then God made himself known to him. Note, We may then expect the discoveries of the divine grace when we are found in the way of our duty and are diligent and sincere in our attendance on holy ordinances.

II. The place where he had this vision. It was *by Jericho; in Jericho*, so the word is; in it by faith and hope, though as yet he had not begun to lay siege to it; in it in thought and expectation; or in the fields of Jericho, hard by the city. There, it should seem, he was all alone, fearless of danger, because sure of the divine protection. There he was (some think) meditating and praying; and to those who are so employed God often graciously manifests himself. Or perhaps there he was to take a view of the city, to observe its fortifications, and contrive how to attack it; and perhaps he was at a loss within himself how to make his approaches, when God came and directed him. Note, God will *help those that help themselves*. *Vigilantibus non dormientibus succurrit lex—The law succours those who watch, not those who sleep*. Joshua was in his post as a general, when God came and made himself known as Generalissimo.

III. The appearance itself. Joshua, as is usual with those that are full of thought and care, was looking downwards, his eyes fixed on the ground, when of a sudden he was surprised with the appearance of a man who stood before him at some little distance, which obliged him to lift up his eyes, and gave a diversion to his musings, v. 13. He appeared to him as a man, but a considerable man, and one fit to be taken notice of. Now, 1. We have reason to think that this man was the Son of God, the eternal Word, who, before he assumed the human nature for a perpetuity, frequently appeared in a human shape. So bishop Patrick thinks, consonant to the judgment of the fathers. Joshua gave him divine honours, and he received them, which a created angel would not have done, and he is called *Jehovah*, ch. vi. 2. 2. He here appeared as a soldier, with *his sword drawn in his hand*. To Abraham in his tent he appeared as a traveller; to Joshua

in the field as a man of war. Christ will be to his people what their faith expects and desires. Christ had his sword drawn, which served, (1.) To justify the war Joshua was engaging in, and to show him that it was of God, who gave him commission to kill and slay. If the sovereign draw the sword, this proclaims war, and authorizes the subject to do so too. The sword is then well drawn when Christ *draws it, and gives the banner to those that fear him, to be displayed because of the truth*, Ps. lx. 4. (2.) To encourage him to carry it on with vigour; for Christ's sword drawn in his hand denotes how ready he is for the defence and salvation of his people, who through him shall do valiantly. His sword turns every way.

IV. The bold question with which Joshua accosted him; he did not send a servant, but stepped up to him himself, and asked, *Art thou for us or for our adversaries?* which intimates his readiness to entertain him if he were for them, and to fight him if he were against them. This shows, 1. His great courage and resolution. He was not ruffled by the suddenness of the appearance, nor daunted with the majesty and bravery which no doubt appeared in the countenance of the person he saw; but, with a presence of mind that became so great a general, put this fair question to him. God had bidden Joshua be courageous, and by this it appears that he was so; for what God by his word requires of his people he does by his grace work in them. 2. His great concern for the people and their cause; so heartily has he embarked in the interests of Israel that none shall stand by him with the face of a man but he will know whether he be a friend or a foe. It should seem, he suspected him for an enemy, a Goliath that had come to *defy the armies of the living God*, and to give him a challenge. Thus apt are we to look upon that as against us which is most for us. The question plainly implies that the cause between the Israelites and the Canaanites, between Christ and Beelzebub, will not admit of a neutrality. *He that is not with us is against us.*

V. The account he gave of himself, v. 14. "Nay, not for your adversaries, you may be sure, but as *captain of the host of the Lord have I now come*, not only for you as a friend, but over you as commander in chief." Here were now, as of old (Gen. xxxii. 2), *Mahanaim, two hosts*, a host of Israelites ready to engage the Canaanites and a host of angels to protect them therein, and he, as captain of both, conducts the host of Israel and commands the host of angels to their assistance. Perhaps in allusion to this Christ is called the *captain of our salvation* (Heb. ii. 10), and a *leader and commander to the people*, Isa. lv. 4. Those cannot but be victorious that have such a captain. He now came as captain to review the troops, to animate them, and to give the necessary orders for the besieging of Jericho.

VI. The great respect Joshua paid him when he understood who he was; it is probable that he perceived, not only by what he said but by some other sensible indications, that he was a divine person, and not a man.

1. Joshua paid homage to him: He *fell on his face to the earth and did worship*. Joshua was himself general of the forces of Israel, and yet he was far from looking with jealousy upon this stranger, who produced a commission as captain of the Lord's host above him; he did not offer to dispute his claims, but cheerfully submitted to him as his commander. It will become the greatest of men to be humble and reverent in their addresses to God. 2. He begged to receive commands and directions from him: *What saith my Lord unto his servant?* His former question was not more bold and soldier-like than this was pious and saint-like; nor was it any disparagement to the greatness of Joshua's spirit thus to humble himself when he had to do with God: even crowned heads cannot bow too low before the throne of the Lord Jesus, who is *King of kings*, Ps. ii. 10, 11; lxxii. 10, 11; Rev. xix. 16. Observe, (1.) The relation he owns between himself and Christ, that Christ was his Lord and himself his servant and under his command, Christ his Captain and himself a soldier under him, to do as he is bidden, Matt. viii. 9. Note, The foundation of all acceptable obedience is laid in a sincere dedication of ourselves, as servants to Jesus Christ as *our Lord*, Ps. xvi. 2. (2.) The enquiry he makes pursuant to this relation: *What saith my Lord?* which implies an earnest desire to know the will of Christ, and a cheerful readiness and resolution to do it. Joshua owns himself an inferior officer, and stands to receive orders. This temper of mind shows him fit for the post he was in; for those know best how to command that know how to obey.

VII. The further expressions of reverence which this divine captain required from Joshua (v. 15): *Loose thy shoe from off thy foot*, in token of reverence and respect (which with us are signified by uncovering the head), and as an acknowledgment of a divine presence, which, while it continued there, did in a manner sanctify the place and dignify it. We are accustomed to say of a person for whom we have a great affection that we love the very ground he treads upon; thus Joshua must show his reverence for this divine person, he must not tread the ground he stood on with his dirty shoes, Eccl. v. 1. Outward expressions of inward reverence, and a religious awe of God, well become us, and are required of us, whenever we approach to him in solemn ordinances. Bishop Patrick well observes here that the very same orders that God gave to Moses at the hush, when he was sending him to bring Israel out of Egypt (Exod. iii. 5), he here gives to Joshua, for the confirming of his faith in the promise he had lately given him, that as he had been

with Moses so he would be with him, *ch.* 1. 5. Had Moses such a presence of God with him as, when it became sensible, sanctified the ground? So had Joshua.

And (*lastly*) Hereby he prepares him to receive the instructions he was about to give him concerning the siege of Jericho, which this captain of the Lord's host had now come to give Israel possession of.

## CHAP. VI.

Joshua opened the campaign with the siege of Jericho, a city which could not trust so much to the courage of its people as to act offensively, and to send out its forces to oppose Israel's landing and encamping, but trusted so much to the strength of its walls as to stand upon its defence, and not to surrender, or desire conditions of peace. Now here we have the story of the taking of it. I. The directions and assurances which the captain of the Lord's host gave concerning it, ver. 1-5. II. The trial of the people's patient obedience in walking round the city six days, ver. 6-14. III. The wonderful delivery of it, into their hands the seventh day, with a solemn charge to them to use it as a devoted thing, ver. 15-21, and ver. 24. IV. The preservation of Rahab and her relations, ver. 22, 23, 25. V. A curse pronounced upon the man that should dare to rebuild this city, ver. 26, 27. An abstract of this story we find among the trophies of faith, Heb. xi. 30. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."

**N**OW Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. 2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. 3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. 5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

We have here a contest between God and the men of Jericho, and their different resolutions, upon which it is easy to say whose word shall prevail.

I. Jericho resolves Israel shall *not* be its master, *v.* 1. It was *straitly shut up, because of the children of Israel.* It *did shut up, and it was shut up* (so it is in the margin); it *did shut up* itself, being strongly fortified both by art and nature, and it *was shut up* by the obstinacy and resolution of the inhabitants, who agreed never to surrender nor so much as sound a parley; none went out as deserters or to treat of peace, nor were any admitted in to offer peace. Thus were they infatuated,

and their hearts hardened to their own destruction—the miserable case and character of all those that *strengthen themselves against the Almighty*, Job xv. 25.

II. God resolves Israel shall be its master, and that quickly. The captain of the Lord's host, here called *Jehovah*, taking notice how strongly Jericho was fortified and how strictly guarded, and knowing Joshua's thoughts and cares about reducing it, and perhaps his fears of a disgrace there and of stumbling at the threshold, gave him here all the assurance he could desire of success (*v.* 2): *See, I have given into thy hand Jericho.* Not, "I will do it, but, I have done it"; it is all thy own, as sure as if it were already in thy possession." It was designed that this city, being the first-fruits of Canaan, should be entirely devoted to God, and that neither Joshua nor Israel should ever be one mite the richer for it, and yet it is here said to be *given into their hand*; for we must reckon that most our own which we have an opportunity of honouring God with and employing in his service. Now, 1. The captain of the Lord's host gives directions how the city should be besieged. No trenches are to be opened, no batteries erected, nor battering rams drawn up, nor any military preparations made; but the ark of God must be carried by the priests round the city once a day for six days together, and seven times the seventh day, attended by the men of war in silence, the priests all the while blowing with trumpets of rams' horns, *v.* 3, 4. This was all they were to do. 2. He assures them that on the seventh day before night they should, without fail, be masters of the town. Upon a signal given, they must all shout, and immediately the wall should fall down, which would not only expose the inhabitants, but so dispirit them that they would not be able to make any resistance, *v.* 5. God appointed this way, (1.) To magnify his own power, that he might be *exalted in his own strength* (Ps. xxi. 13), not in the strength of instruments. God would hereby yet further make bare his own almighty arm for the encouragement of Israel and the terror and confusion of the Canaanites. (2.) To put an honour upon his ark, the instituted token of his presence, and to give a reason for the laws by which the people were obliged to look upon it with the most profound veneration and respect. When, long after this, the ark was brought into the camp without orders from God, it was looked upon as a profanation of it, and the people paid dearly for their presumption, 1 Sam. iv. 3, &c. But now that it was done by the divine appointment it was an honour to the ark of God, and a great encouragement to the faith of Israel. (3.) It was likewise to put honour upon the priests, who were appointed upon this occasion to carry the ark and sound the trumpets. Ordinarily the priests were excused from war, but that this privilege, with other honours and powers that

the law had given them, might not be grudged them, in this service they are principally employed, and so the people are made sensible what blessings they were to the public and how well worthy of all the advantages conferred upon them. (4.) It was to try the faith, obedience, and patience, of the people, to try whether they would observe a precept which to human policy seemed foolish to obey and believe a promise which in human probability seemed impossible to be performed. They were also proved whether they could patiently bear the reproaches of their enemies and patiently wait for the salvation of the Lord. Thus by faith, not by force, the walls of Jericho fell down. (5.) It was to encourage the hope of Israel with reference to the remaining difficulties that were before them. That suggestion of the evil spies that Canaan could never be conquered because the cities were *walled up to heaven* (Deut. i. 28) would by this be forever silenced. The strongest and highest walls cannot hold out against Omnipotence; they needed not to fight, and therefore needed not to fear, because God fought for them.

6 And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD. 7 And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD. 8 And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. 9 And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, *the priests* going on, and blowing with the trumpets. 10 And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall *any* word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. 11 So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about *it* once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp. 12 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 And seven priests

bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, *the priests* going on, and blowing with the trumpets. 14 And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned unto the camp: so they did six days. 15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. 16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

We have here an account of the cavaleade which Israel made about Jericho, the orders Joshua gave concerning it, as he had received them from the Lord and their punctual observance of these orders. We do not find that he gave the people the express assurances God had given him that he would deliver the city into their hands; but he tried whether they would obey orders with a general confidence that it would end well, and we find them very observant both of God and Joshua.

I. Wherever the ark went the people attended it, v. 9. The armed men went before it to clear the way, not thinking it any disparagement to them, though they were men of war, to be pioneers to the ark of God. If any obstacle should be found in crossing the roads that led to the city (which they must do in walking round it) they would remove it; if any opposition should be made by the enemy, they would encounter it, that the priests' march with the ark might be easy and safe. It is an honour to the greatest men to do any good office to the ark and to serve the interests of religion in their country. The *rereward*, either another body of armed men, or Dan's squadron, which marched last through the wilderness, or, as some think, the multitude of the people who were not armed or disciplined for war (as many of them as would) followed the ark, to testify their respect to it, to grace the solemnity, and to be witnesses of what was done. Every faithful zealous Israelite would be willing to undergo the same fatigues and run the same hazard with the priests that bore the ark.

II. Seven priests went immediately before the ark, having trumpets in their hands, with which they were continually sounding, v. 4, 5, 9, 13. The priests were God's ministers



and thus in his name. 1. They proclaimed war with the Canaanites, and so struck a terror upon them; for by terrors upon their spirits they were to be conquered and subdued. Thus God's ministers, by the solemn declarations of his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, must blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in the holy mountain, that the sinners in Zion may be afraid. They are God's heralds to denounce war against all those that go on still in their trespasses, but say, "We shall have peace, though we go on." 2. They proclaimed God's gracious presence with Israel, and so put life and courage into them. It was appointed that when they went to war the priests should encourage them with the assurance of God's presence with them, Deut. xx. 2—4. And particularly their blowing with trumpets was to be a sign to the people that they should be remembered before the Lord their God in the day of battle, Num. x. 9. It encouraged Abijah, 2 Chron. xiii. 12. Thus God's ministers, by sounding the Jubilee trumpet of the everlasting gospel, which proclaims liberty and victory, must encourage the good soldiers of Jesus Christ in their spiritual warfare.

III. The trumpets they used were not those silver trumpets which were appointed to be made for their ordinary service, but trumpets of rams' horns, bored hollow for the purpose, as some think. These trumpets were of the basest matter, dullest sound, and least show, that the excellency of the power might be of God. Thus by the foolishness of preaching, fitly compared to the sounding of these rams' horns, the devil's kingdom is thrown down; and the *weapons of our warfare*, though they are not carnal nor seem to a carnal eye likely to bring any thing to pass, are yet *mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds*, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. The word here is *trumpets of Jubel*, that is, such trumpets as they used to blow withal in the year of jubilee; so many interpreters understand it, as signifying the complete liberty to which Israel was now brought, and the bringing of the land of Canaan into the hands of its just and rightful owners.

IV. All the people were commanded to be silent, not to speak a word, nor make any noise (v. 10), that they might the more carefully attend to the sound of the sacred trumpets, which they were now to look upon as the voice of God among them; and it does not become us to speak when God is speaking. It likewise intimates their reverent expectation of the event. Zech. ii. 13, *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord*. Exod. xiv. 14, *God shall fight, and you shall hold your peace*.

V. They were to do this once a day for six days together and seven times the seventh day, and they did so, v. 14, 15. God could have caused the walls of Jericho to fall upon the first surrounding of them, but they must

go round them thirteen times before they fall, that they might be kept waiting patiently for the Lord. Though they had lately come into Canaan, and their time was very precious (for they had a great deal of work before them), yet they must linger so many days about Jericho, seeming to do nothing, nor to make any progress in their business. As promised deliverances must be expected in God's way, so they must be expected in his time. *He that believes does not make haste*, not more haste than God would have him make. *Go yet seven times*, before any thing hopeful appears, 1 Kings xvii. 43.

VI. One of these days must needs be a sabbath day, and the Jews say that it was the last, but this is not certain; however, if he that appointed them to rest on the other sabbath days appointed them to walk on this, that was sufficient to justify them in it; he never intended to bind himself by his own laws, but that when he pleased he might dispense with them. The impotent man went upon this principle when he argued (John v. 11), *He that made me whole* (and therefore has a divine power) *saith unto me, Take up thy bed*. And, in this case here, it was an honour to the sabbath day, by which our time is divided into weeks, that just seven days were to be spent in this work, and seven priests were employed to sound seven trumpets, this number being, on this occasion, as well as many others, made remarkable, in remembrance of the six days' work of creation and the seventh day's rest from it. And, besides, the law of the sabbath forbids our own work, which is servile and secular, but this which they did was a religious act. It is certainly no breach of the sabbath rest to do the sabbath work, for the sake of which the rest was instituted; and what is the sabbath work but to attend the ark in all its motions?

VII. They continued to do this during the time appointed, and seven times the seventh day, though they saw not any effect of it, believing that *at the end the vision would speak and not lie*, Hab. ii. 3. If we persevere in the way of duty, we shall lose nothing by it in the long run. It is probable they walked at such a distance from the walls as to be out of the reach of the enemies' arrows and out of the hearing of their scoffs. We may suppose the oddness of the thing did at first amuse the besieged, but by the seventh day they had grown secure, feeling no harm from that which perhaps they looked upon as an enchantment. Probably they bantered the besiegers, as those mentioned in Neh. iv. 2, "*What do these feeble Jews?*" Is this the people we thought so formidable? Are these their methods of attack?" Thus they cried peace and safety, that the destruction might be the more terrible when it came. *Wicked men* (says bishop Hall) *think God in jest when he is preparing for their judgment*; but they will be convinced of their mistake when it is too late.

VIII. At last they were to give a shout, and did so, and immediately the walls fell, *v.* 16. This was a shout for mastery, a triumphant shout; the *shout of a king is among them*, Num. xxiii. 21. This was a shout of faith; they believed that the walls of Jericho would fall, and by this faith the walls were thrown down. It was a shout of prayer, an echo to the sound of the trumpets which proclaimed the promise that God would remember them; with one accord, as one man, they cry to heaven for help, and help comes in. Some allude to this to show that we must never expect a complete victory over our own corruptions till the very evening of our last day, and then we shall shout in triumph over them, *when we come to the number and measure of our perfection*, as bishop Hall expresses it. *A good heart (says he) groans under the sense of his infirmities, vain would be rid of them, and strives and prays, but, when all is done, until the end of the seventh day it cannot be; then judgment shall be brought forth unto victory.* And at the end of time, when our Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the sound of a trumpet, Satan's kingdom shall be completely ruined, and not till then, when all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be effectually and eternally put down.

17 And the city shall be accursed, *even* it, and all that *are* therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18 And ye, in any wise keep *yourselves* from the accursed thing, lest ye make *yourselves* accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, *are* consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. 20 So the people shouted when *the priests* blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 21 And they utterly destroyed all that *was* in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. 22 But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go

into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. 23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. 24 And they burnt the city with fire, and all that *was* therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. 25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel *even* unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. 26 And Joshua adjured *them* at that time, saying, Cursed *be* the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest *son* shall he set up the gates of it. 27 So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was *noised* throughout all the country.

The people had religiously observed the orders given them concerning the besieging of Jericho, and now at length Joshua had told them (*v.* 16), "*The Lord hath given you the city, enter and take possession.*" Accordingly in these verses we have,

I. The rules they were to observe in taking possession. God gives it to them, and therefore may direct it to what uses and intents, and clog it with what provisos and limitations he thinks fit. It is given to them to be devoted to God, as the first and perhaps the worst of all the cities of Canaan. 1. The city must be burnt, and all the lives in it sacrificed without mercy to the justice of God. All this they knew was included in those words, *v.* 17. The city shall be a *cherem*, a devoted thing, it and all therein, to the Lord. No life in it might be ransomed upon any terms; they must all be surely *put to death*, Lev. xxvii. 29. So he appoints from whom as creatures they had received their lives, and to whom as sinners they had forfeited them; and who may dispute his sentence? *Is God unrighteous, who thus taketh vengeance?* God forbid we should entertain such a thought! There was more of God seen in the taking of Jericho than of any other of the cities of Canaan, and therefore that must be more than any other devoted to

him. And the severe usage of this city would strike a terror upon all the rest and melt their hearts yet more before Israel. Only, when this severity is ordered, Rahab and her family are excepted: *She shall live and all that are with her.* She had distinguished herself from her neighbours by the kindness she showed to Israel, and therefore shall be distinguished from them by the speedy return of that kindness. 2. All the treasure of it, the money and plate and valuable goods, must be consecrated to the service of the tabernacle, and brought into the stock of dedicated things, the Jews say because the city was taken on the sabbath day. Thus God would be honoured by the beautifying and enriching of his tabernacle; thus preparation was made for the extraordinary expenses of his service; and thus the Israelites were taught not to set their hearts upon worldly wealth nor to aim at heaping up abundance of it for themselves. God had promised them a land *flowing with milk and honey*, not a land abounding with silver and gold; for he would have them live comfortably in it, that they might serve him cheerfully, but not covet either to trade with distant countries or to hoard for after times. He would likewise have them to reckon themselves enriched in the enriching of the tabernacle, and to think that which was laid up in God's house as truly their honour and wealth as if it had been laid up in their own. 3. A particular caution is given them to take heed of meddling with the forbidden spoil; for what was devoted to God, if they offered to appropriate it to their own use, would prove accursed to them; therefore (v. 18) "*In any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing; you will find yourselves inclined to reach towards it, but check yourselves, and frighten yourselves from having any thing to do with it.*" He speaks as if he foresaw the sin of Achan, which we have an account of in the next chapter, when he gives this reason for the caution, *lest you make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it*, as it proved that Achan did.

II. The entrance that was opened to them into the city by the sudden fall of the walls, or at least that part of the wall over against which they then were when they gave the shout (v. 20): *The wall fell down flat*, and probably killed abundance of people, the guards that stood sentinel upon it, or others that crowded about it, to look at the Israelites that were walking round. We read of thousands killed by the fall of a wall, 1 Kings xx. 30. That which they trusted to for defence proved their destruction. The sudden fall of the wall, no doubt, put the inhabitants into such a consternation that they had no strength nor spirit to make any resistance, but they became an easy prey to the sword of Israel, and saw to how little purpose it was to shut their gates against a people that had *the Lord on the head of them*, Mic. ii. 13.

Note, The God of heaven easily can, and certainly will, break down all the opposing power of his and his church's enemies. Gates of brass and bars of iron are, before him, but as straw and rotten wood, Isa. xlv. 1, 2. *Who will bring me into the strong city? Wilt not thou, O God?* Ps. lx. 9, 10. Thus shall Satan's kingdom fall, nor shall any prosper that harden themselves against God.

III. The execution of the orders given concerning this devoted city. All that breathed were put to the sword; not only the men that were found in arms, but the women, and children, and old people. Though they cried for quarter, and begged ever so earnestly for their lives, there was no room for compassion, pity must be forgotten: they *utterly destroyed all*, v. 21. If they had not had a divine warrant under the seal of miracles for this execution, it could not have been justified, nor can it justify the like now, when we are sure no such warrant can be produced. But, being appointed by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth to do it, who is not unrighteous in taking vengeance, they are to be applauded in doing it as the faithful ministers of his justice. Work for God was then bloody work; and *cursed was he that did it deceitfully, keeping back his sword from blood*, Jer. xlviii. 10. But the spirit of the gospel is very different, for Christ came not to destroy men's lives but to save them, Luke ix. 56. Christ's victories were of another nature. The cattle were put to death with the owners, as additional sacrifices to the divine justice. The cattle of the Israelites, when slain at the altar, were accepted as sacrifices for them, but the cattle of these Canaanites were required to be slain as sacrifices with them, for their iniquity was not to be purged with sacrifice and offering: both were for the glory of God. 2. The city was *burnt with fire, and all that was in it*, v. 24. The Israelites, perhaps, when they had taken Jericho, a large and well-built city, hoped they should have that for their head-quarters; but God will have them yet to dwell in tents, and therefore fires this nest, lest they should nestle in it. 3. All the silver and gold, and all those vessels which were capable of being purified by fire, were brought into the treasury of the house of the Lord; not that he needed it, but that he would be honoured by it, as the Lord of hosts, of their hosts in particular, the God that gave the victory and therefore might demand the spoil, either the whole, as here, or, as sometimes, a tenth, Heb. vii. 4.

IV. The preservation of Rahab the harlot, or inn-keeper, who *perished not with those that believed not*, Heb. xi. 31. The public faith was engaged for her safety by the two spies, who acted therein as public persons; and therefore, though the hurry they were in at the taking of the town was no doubt very great, yet Joshua took effectual care for her preservation. The same persons that she

had secured were employed to secure her, v. 22, 23. They were best able to do it who knew her and her house, and they were fittest to do it, that it might appear it was for the sake of her kindness to them that she was thus distinguished and had her life given her for a prey. All her kindred were saved with her; like Noah she believed to the saving of her house; and thus faith in Christ brings salvation to the house, Acts xvi. 31. Some ask how her house, which is said to have been upon the wall (ch. ii. 15), escaped falling with the wall; we are sure it did escape, for she and her relations were safe in it, either though it joined so near to the wall as to be said to be upon it, yet it was so far off as not to fall either with the wall or under it; or, rather, that part of the wall on which her house stood fell not. Now being preserved alive, 1. She was left for some time without the camp to be purified from the Gentile superstition, which she was to renounce, and to be prepared for her admission as a proselyte. 2. She was in due time incorporated with the church of Israel, and she and her posterity dwelt in Israel, and her family was remarkable long after. We find her the wife of Salmon, prince of Judah, mother of Boaz, and named among the ancestors of our Saviour, Matt. i. 5. Having received Israelites in the name of Israelites, she had an Israelite's reward. Bishop Pierson observes that Joshua's saving Rahab the harlot, and admitting her into Israel, were a figure of Christ's receiving into his kingdom, and entertaining there, the publicans and the harlots, Matt. xxi. 31. Or it may be applied to the conversion of the Gentiles.

V. Jericho is condemned to a perpetual desolation, and a curse pronounced upon the man that at any time hereafter should offer to rebuild it (v. 26): *Joshua adjured them*, that is, the elders and people of Israel, not only by their own consent, obliging themselves and their posterity never to rebuild this city, but by the divine appointment, God himself having forbidden it under the severe penalty here annexed. 1. God would hereby show the weight of a divine curse; where it rests there is no contending with it nor getting from under it; it brings ruin without remedy or repair. 2. He would have it to remain in its ruins a standing monument of his wrath against the Canaanites when the measure of their iniquity was full, and of his mercy to his people when the time had come for their settlement in Canaan. The desolations of their enemies were witnesses of his favour to them, and would upbraid them with their ingratitude to that God who had done so much for them. The situation of the city was very pleasant, and probably its nearness to Jordan was an advantage to it, which would tempt men to build upon the same spot: but they are here told it is at their peril if they do it. Men build for their posterity, but he that builds Jericho shall have

no posterity to enjoy what he builds; his eldest son shall die when he begins the work, and if he take not warning by that stroke to desist, but will go on presumptuously, the finishing of his work shall be attended with the funeral of his youngest, and we must suppose all the rest cut off between. This curse, not being a *curse causeless*, did come upon that man who long after rebuilt Jericho (1 Kings xvi. 34), but we are not to think it made the place ever the worse when it was built, or brought any hurt to those that inhabited it. We find Jericho afterwards graced with the presence, not only of those two great prophets Elijah and Elisha, but of our blessed Saviour himself, Luke xviii. 35; xix. 1; Matt. xx. 29. Note, It is a dangerous thing to attempt the building up of that which God will have to be destroyed. See Mal. i. 4.

*Lastly*, All this magnified Joshua and raised his reputation (v. 27); it made him not only acceptable to Israel, but formidable to the Canaanites, because it appeared that God was with him of a truth: the Word of the Lord was with him, so the Chaldee, even Christ himself, the same that was with Moses. Nothing can more raise a man's reputation, nor make him appear more truly great, than to have the evidences of God's presence with him.

#### CHAP. VII.

More than once we have found the affairs of Israel, even when they were in the happiest posture and gave the most hopeful prospects, perplexed and embarrassed by sin, and a stop thereby put to the most promising proceedings. The golden calf, the murmuring at Kadesh, and the iniquity of Peor, had broken their measures and given them great disturbance; and in this chapter we have such another instance of the interruption given to the progress of their army by sin. But it being only the sin of one person or family, and soon expiated, the consequences were not so mischievous as of those other sins: however it served to let them know that they were still upon their good behaviour. We have here, I. The sin of Achan in meddling with the accursed thing, ver. 1. II. The defeat of Israel before Ai thereupon, ver. 2-5. III. Joshua's humiliation and prayer on occasion of that sad disaster, ver. 6-9. IV. The directions God gave him for the putting away of the guilt which had provoked God thus to contend with them, ver. 10-15. V. The discovery, trial, conviction, condemnation, and execution, of the criminal, by which the anger of God was turned away, ver. 16-26. And by this story it appears that, as the Jews, so Canaan itself, "made nothing perfect," the perfection both of holiness and peace to God's Israel is to be expected in the heavenly Canaan only.

**B**UT the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. 2 And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and

make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but* few. 4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. 5 And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them *from* before the gate *even* unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

The story of this chapter begins with a *but*. *The Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was noised through all that country*, so the foregoing chapter ends, and it left no room to doubt but that he would go on as he had begun *conquering and to conquer*. He did right, and observed his orders in every thing. *But the children of Israel committed a trespass*, and so set God against them; and then even Joshua's name and fame, his wisdom and courage, could do them no service. If we lose our God, we lose our friends, who cannot help us unless God be for us. Now here is,

I. Achan sinning, *v. 1*. Here is only a general mention made of the sin; we shall afterwards have a more particular account of it from his own mouth. The sin is here said to be *taking of the accursed thing*, in disobedience to the command and in defiance of the threatening, *ch. vi. 18*. In the sacking of Jericho orders were given that they should neither spare any lives nor take any treasure to themselves; we read not of the breach of the former prohibition (there were none to whom they showed any mercy), but of the latter: compassion was put off and yielded to the law, but covetousness was indulged. The love of the world is that root of bitterness which of all others is most hardly rooted up. Yet the history of Achan is a plain intimation that he of all the thousands of Israel was the only delinquent in this matter. Had there been more in like manner guilty, no doubt we should have heard of it; and it is strange there were no more. The temptation was strong. It was easy to suggest what a pity it was that so many things of value should be burnt; to what purpose is this waste? In plundering cities, every man reckons himself entitled to what he can lay his hands on. It was easy to promise themselves secrecy and impunity. Yet by the grace of God such impressions were made upon the minds of the Israelites by the ordinances of God, circumcision and the passover, which they had lately been partakers of, and by the providences of God which had been concerning them, that they stood in awe of the divine precept and judgment, and generously denied themselves in obedience to their God. And yet, though it was a single person that sinned, the children of

Israel are said *to commit the trespass*, because one of their body did it, and he was not as yet separated from them, nor disowned by them. They did it, that is, by what Achan did guilt was brought upon the whole society of which he was a member. This should be a warning to us to take heed of sin ourselves, lest by it many be defiled or disquieted (*Heb. xii. 15*), and to take heed of having fellowship with sinners, and of being in league with them, lest we share in their guilt. Many a careful tradesman has been broken by a careless partner. And it concerns us to watch over one another for the preventing of sin, because others' sins may redound to our damage.

II. The camp of Israel suffering for the same: *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel*; he saw the offence, though they did not, and takes a course to make them see it; for one way or other, sooner or later, secret sins will be brought to light; and, if men enquire not after them, God will, and with his enquiries will awaken theirs. Many a community is under guilt and wrath and is not aware of it till the fire breaks out: here it broke out quickly. 1. Joshua sends a detachment to seize upon the next city that was in their way, and that was Ai. Only 3000 men were sent, advice being brought him by his spies that the place was inconsiderable, and needed no greater force for the reduction of it, *v. 2, 3*. Now perhaps it was a culpable assurance, or security rather, that led them to send so small a party on this expedition; it might also be an indulgence of the people in the love of ease, for they will not have all *the people to labour thither*. Perhaps the people were the less forward to go upon this expedition because they were denied the plunder of Jericho; and these spies were willing they should be gratified. Whereas when that town was to be taken, though God by his own power would throw down the walls, yet they must *all labour thither and labour there too*, in walking round it. It did not bode well at all that God's Israel began to think much of their labour, and contrived how to spare their pains. It is required that we *work out our salvation*, though it is *God that works in us*. It has likewise often proved of bad consequence to make too light of an enemy. *They are but few* (say the spies), but, as few as they were, they were too many for them. It will awaken our care and diligence in our Christian warfare to consider that *we wrestle with principalities and powers*. 2. The party he sent, in their first attack upon the town, were repulsed with some loss (*v. 4, 5*): *They fled before the men of Ai*, finding themselves unaccountably dispirited, and their enemies to sally out upon them with more vigour and resolution than they expected. In their retreat they had about thirty-six men cut off: no great loss indeed out of such a number, but a dreadful surprise to those who had no

reason to expect any other in any attack than clear, cheap, and certain victory. And now, as it proves, it is well there were but 3000 that fell under this disgrace. Had the body of the army been there, they would have been no more able to keep their ground, now they were under guilt and wrath, than this small party, and to them the defeat would have been much more grievous and dishonourable. However, it was bad enough as it was, and served, (1.) To humble God's Israel, and to teach them always to *rejoice with trembling*. *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast as he that putteth it off.* (2.) To harden the Canaanites, and to make them the more secure notwithstanding the terrors they had been struck with, that their ruin, when it came, might be the more dreadful. (3.) To be an evidence of God's displeasure against Israel, and a call to them to *purge out the old leaven*. And this was principally intended in their defeat. 3. The retreat of this party in disorder put the whole camp of Israel into a fright: *The hearts of the people melted*, not so much for the loss as for the disappointment. Joshua had assured them that *the living God would without fail drive out the Canaanites from before them*, ch. iii. 10. How can this event be reconciled to that promise? To every thinking man among them it appeared an indication of God's displeasure, and an omen of something worse, and therefore no marvel it put them into such a consternation; if *God turn to be their enemy and fight against them*, what will become of them? True Israelites tremble when God is angry.

6 And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. 7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8 O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?

We have here an account of the deep concern Joshua was in upon this sad occasion. He, as a public person, interested himself more than any other in this public loss, and is therein an example to princes and great men, and teaches them to lay much to heart the calamities that befall their people: he is

also a type of Christ, to whom the blood of his subjects is precious, Ps. lxxii. 14. Observe,

I. How he grieved: He *rent his clothes* (v. 6), in token of great sorrow for this public disaster, and especially a dread of God's displeasure, which was certainly the cause of it. Had it been but the common chance of war (as we are too apt to express it), it would not have become a general to droop thus under it; but, when God was angry, it was his duty and honour to feel thus. One of the bravest soldiers that ever was owned that *his flesh trembled for fear of God*, Ps. cxix. 120. As one *humbling himself under the mighty hand of God, he fell to the earth upon his face*, not thinking it any disparagement to him to lie thus low before the great God, to whom he directed this token of reverence, by keeping his eye towards *the ark of the Lord*. The elders of Israel, being interested in the cause and influenced by his example, prostrated themselves with him, and, in token of deep humiliation, *put dust upon their heads*, not only as mourners, but as penitents; not doubting but it was for some sin or other that God did thus contend with them (though they knew not what it was), they *humbled themselves* before God, and thus deprecated the progress of his wrath. This they continued *until even-tide*, to show that it was not the result of a sudden feeling, but proceeded from a deep conviction of their misery and danger if God were any way provoked to depart from them. Joshua did not fall foul upon his spies for their misinformation concerning the strength of the enemy, nor upon the soldiers for their cowardice, though perhaps both were blameworthy, but *his eye is up to God; for is there any evil in the camp and he has not done it?* His eye is upon God as displeased, and that troubles him.

II. How he prayed, or pleaded rather, humbly expostulating the case with God, not sullen, as David when *the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah*, but much affected; his spirit seemed to be somewhat ruffled and discomposed, yet not so as to be put out of frame for prayer; but, by giving vent to his trouble in a humble address to God, he keeps his temper and it ends well. 1. Now he wishes they had all taken up with the iot of the two tribes on the other side Jordan, v. 7. He thinks it would have been better to have staid there and been cut short than come hither to be cut off. This savours too much of discontent and distrust of God, and cannot be justified, though the surprise and disappointment to one deeply concerned for the public interest may in part excuse it. Those words, *wherefore hast thou brought us over Jordan to destroy us?* are too like what the murmurers often said (Exod. xiv. 11, 12; xvi. 3; xvii. 3; Num. xiv. 2, 3); but he that searches the heart knew they came from another spirit, and therefore was not extreme

to mark what he said amiss. Had Joshua considered that this disorder which their affairs were put into no doubt proceeded from something amiss, which yet might easily be redressed, and all set to rights again (as often in his predecessor's time), he would not have spoken of it as a thing taken for granted that they were *delivered into the hands of the Amorites to be destroyed*. God knows what he does, though we do not; but this we may be sure of, he never did nor ever will do us any wrong. 2. He speaks as one quite at a loss concerning the meaning of this event (v. 8): "*What shall I say, what construction can I put upon it, when Israel, thy own people, for whom thou hast lately done such great things and to whom thou hast promised the full possession of this land, when they turn their backs before their enemies*" (their necks, so the word is), "when they not only flee before them, but fall before them, and become a prey to them? What shall we think of the divine power? Is the Lord's arm shortened? Of the divine promise? Is his word yea and nay? Of what God has done for us? Shall this be all undone again and prove in vain?" Note, The methods of Providence are often intricate and perplexing, and such as the wisest and best of men know not what to say to; but *they shall know hereafter*, John xiii. 7. 3. He pleads the danger Israel was now in of being ruined. He gives up all for lost: "*The Canaanites will environ us round, concluding that now our defence having departed, and the scales being turned in their favour, we shall soon be as contemptible as ever we were formidable, and they will cut off our name from the earth,*" v. 9. Thus even good men, when things go against them a little, are too apt to fear the worst, and make harder conclusions than there is reason for. But this comes in here as a plea: "Lord, let not Israel's name, which has been so dear to thee and so great in the world, be cut off." 4. He pleads the reproach that would be cast on God, and that if Israel were ruined his glory would suffer by it. They will *cut off our name*, says he, yet, as if he had corrected himself for insisting upon that, it is no great matter (thinks he) what becomes of our little name (the cutting off of that will be a small loss), but *what wilt thou do for thy great name?* This he looks upon and laments as the great aggravation of the calamity. He feared it would reflect on God, his wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness; what would the Egyptians say? Note, Nothing is more grievous to a gracious soul than dishonour done to God's name. This also he insists upon as a plea for the preventing of his fears and for a return of God's favour; it is the only word in all his address that has any encouragement in it, and he concludes with it, leaving it to this issue, *Father, glorify thy name*. The name of God is a great name,

above every name; and, whatever happens, we ought to believe that he will, and pray that he would, work for his own name, that *this may not be polluted*. This should be our concern more than any thing else. On this we must fix our eye as the end of all our desires, and from this we must fetch our encouragement as the foundation of all our hopes. We cannot urge a better plea than this, Lord, *What wilt thou do for thy great name?* Let God in all be glorified, and then welcome his whole will.

10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.* 14 In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, *that* the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families *thereof*; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man. 15 And it shall be, *that* he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

We have here God's answer to Joshua's address, which, we may suppose, came from the oracle over the ark, before which Joshua had prostrated himself, v. 6. Those that desire to know the will of God must attend with their desires upon the lively oracles, and wait at wisdom's gates for wisdom's dictates, Prov. viii. 34. And let those that find them-

selves under the tokens of God's displeasure never complain of him, but complain to him, and they shall receive an answer of peace. The answer came immediately, while he was yet speaking (Isa. lxx. 24), as that to Daniel, Dan. ix. 20, &c.

I. God encourages Joshua against his present dependencies, and the black and melancholy apprehensions he had of the present posture of Israel's affairs (v. 10): "*Get thee up, suffer not thy spirits to droop and sink thus; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*" No doubt Joshua did well to humble himself before God, and mourn as he did, under the tokens of his displeasure; but now God told him it was enough, he would not have him continue any longer in that melancholy posture, for God delights not in the grief of penitents when they afflict their souls further than as it qualifies them for pardon and peace; the days even of that mourning must be ended. *Arise, shake thyself from the dust,* Isa. lii. 2. Joshua continued his mourning till eventide (v. 6), so late that they could do nothing that night towards the discovery of the criminal, but were forced to put it off till next morning. Daniel (Dan. ix. 21), and Ezra (Ezra ix. 5, 6), continued their mourning only till the time of the evening sacrifice; that revived them both: but Joshua went past that time, and therefore is thus roused: "*Get thee up, do not lie all night there.*" Yet we find that Moses fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, to make intercession for Israel, Deut. ix. 18. Joshua must get up because he has other work to do than to lie there; the accursed thing must be discovered and cast out, and the sooner the better; Joshua is the man that must do it, and therefore it is time for him to lay aside his mourning weeds, and put on his judge's robes, and *clothe himself with zeal as a cloak.* Weeping must not hinder sowing, nor one duty of religion jostle out another. Every thing is beautiful in its season. Shechaniah perhaps had an eye to this in what he said to Ezra upon a like occasion. See Ezra x. 2—4.

II. He informs him of the true and only cause of this disaster, and shows him wherefore he contended with them (v. 11): *Israel hath sinned.* "Think not that God's mind is changed, his arm shortened, or his promise about to fail; no, it is sin, it is sin, that great mischief-maker, that has stopped the current of divine favours and has made this breach upon you." The sinner is not named, though the sin is described, but it is spoken of as the act of Israel in general, till they have fastened it upon the particular person, and their *godly sorrow* have so wrought a *clearing of themselves*, as theirs did, 2 Cor. vii. 11. Observe how the sin is here made to appear exceedingly sinful. 1. *They have transgressed my covenant*, an express precept with a penalty annexed to it. It was agreed that God should have all the spoil of Jericho, and

they should have the spoil of the rest of the cities of Canaan; but, in robbing God of his part, they *transgressed this covenant.* 2. *They have even taken of the devoted thing*, in contempt of the curse which was so solemnly denounced against him that should dare to break in upon God's property, as if that curse had nothing in it formidable. 3. *They have also stolen*; they did it clandestinely, as if they could conceal it from the divine omniscience, and they were ready to say, *The Lord shall not see*, or will not miss so small a matter out of so great a spoil. *Thus thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself.* 4. They have *dissembled* also. Probably, when the action was over, Joshua called all the tribes, and asked them whether they had faithfully disposed of the spoil, according to the divine command, and charged them, if they knew of any transgression, that they should discover it, but Achan joined with the rest in a general protestation of innocency, and kept his countenance, like the adulterous woman that *eats and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no wickedness.* Nay, 5. They have put the accursed thing *among their own goods*, as if they had as good a title to that as to any thing they have, never expecting to be called to an account, nor designing to make restitution. All this Joshua, though a wise and vigilant ruler, knew nothing of, till God told him, who knows all the secret wickedness that is in the world, which men know nothing of. God could at this time have told him who the person was that had done this thing, but he does not. (1.) To exercise the zeal of Joshua and Israel, in searching out the criminal. (2.) To give the sinner himself space to repent and make confession. Joshua no doubt proclaimed it immediately throughout the camp that there was such a transgression committed, upon which, if Achan had surrendered himself, and penitently owned his guilt, and prevented the scrutiny, who knows but he might have had the benefit of that law which accepted of a trespass-offering, with restitution, from those that had *sinned through ignorance in the holy things of the law?* Lev. v. 15, 16. But Achan never discovering himself till the lot discovered him evidenced the hardness of his heart, and therefore he found no mercy.

III. He awakens him to enquire further into it, by telling him, 1. That this was the only ground for the controversy God had with them, this, and nothing else; so that when this accursed thing was put away he needed not fear, all would be well, the stream of their successes, when this one obstruction was removed, would run as strong as ever. 2. That if this accursed thing were not destroyed they could not expect the return of God's gracious presence; in plain terms, *neither will I be with you any more* as I have been, *except you destroy the accursed*, that is, the accursed person, who is made so by the



accursed thing. That which is accursed will be destroyed; and those whom God has entrusted to bear the sword bear it in vain if they make it not a terror to that wickedness which brings these judgments of God on a land. By personal repentance and reformation, we destroy the accursed thing in our own hearts, and, unless we do this, we must never expect the favour of the blessed God. Let all men know that it is nothing but sin that separates between them and God, and, if it be not sincerely repented of and forsaken, it will separate eternally.

IV. He directs him in what method to make this enquiry and prosecution. 1. He must *sanctify the people*, now over-night, that is, as it is explained, he must command them to *sanctify themselves*, v. 13. And what can either magistrates or ministers do more towards sanctification? They must put themselves into a suitable frame to appear before God and submit to the divine scrutiny, must examine themselves, now that God was coming to examine them, must *prepare to meet their God*. They were called to sanctify themselves when they were to receive the *divine law* (Exod. xix.), and now also when they were to *come under the divine judgment*; for in both God is to be attended with the utmost reverence. "There is an *accursed thing in the midst of you*, and therefore *sanctify yourselves*," that is, Let all that are innocent be able to clear themselves, and be the more careful to cleanse themselves. The sin of others may be improved by us as furtherances of our sanctification, as the scandal of the incestuous Corinthian occasioned a blessed reformation in that church, 2 Cor. vii. 11. 2. He must bring them all under the scrutiny of the lot (v. 14); the tribe which the guilty person was of should first be discovered by lot, then the family, then the household, and last of all the person. The conviction came upon him thus gradually that he might have some space given him to come in and surrender himself; for God is *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. Observe, The Lord is said to take the tribe, and family, and household, on which the lot fell, because *the disposal of the lot is of the Lord*, and, however casual it seems, is under the direction of infinite wisdom and justice; and to show that when the sin of sinners finds them out God is to be acknowledged in it; it is he that seizes them, and the arrests are in his name. *God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants*, Gen. xiv. 16. It is also intimated with what a certain and unerring judgment the righteous God does and will distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, so that though for a time they seem involved in the same condemnation, as the whole tribe did when it was first taken by the lot, yet he who has his fan in his hand will effectually provide for the *taking out of the precious from the vile*; so that though the

righteous he of the same tribe, and family, and household, with the wicked, yet they shall never be treated *as the wicked*, Gen. xviii. 25. 3. When the criminal was found out he must be put to death *without mercy* (Heb. x. 28), and with all the expressions of a holy detestation, v. 15. He and all that he has must be burnt with fire, that there might be no remainders of the accursed thing among them; and the reason given for this severe sentence is because the criminal has, (1.) Given a great affront to God: He has *transgressed the covenant of the Lord*, who is jealous particularly for the honour of the holy covenant. (2.) He has done a great injury to the church of God: He has *wrought folly in Israel*, has shamed that nation which is looked upon by all its neighbours to be a *wise and understanding people*, has infected that nation which is sanctified to God, and troubled that nation of which he is the protector. These being crimes so heinous in their nature, and of such pernicious consequence and example, the execution, which otherwise would have come under the imputation of cruelty, is to be applauded as a piece of necessary justice. It was *sacrilege*; it was invading God's rights, alienating his property, and converting to a private use that which was devoted to his glory and appropriated to the service of his sanctuary—this was the crime to be thus severely punished, for warning to all people in all ages to take heed how they rob God.

16 So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: 17 And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarahites: and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: 18 And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. 19 And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me, 20 And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: 21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst

of my tent, and the silver under it. 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent: and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. 23 And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. 24 And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. 26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.

We have in these verses,

I. The discovery of Achan by the lot, which proved a perfect lot, though it proceeded gradually. Though we may suppose that Joshua slept the better, and with more ease and satisfaction, when he knew the worst of the disease of that body of which, under God, he was the head, and was put into a certain method of cure, yet *he rose up early in the morning* (v. 16), so much was his heart upon it, to put away the accursed thing. We have found Joshua upon other occasions an early riser; here it shows his zeal and vehement desire to see Israel restored to the divine favour. In the scrutiny observe, 1. That the guilty tribe was that of Judah, which was, and was to be, of all the tribes, the most honourable and illustrious; this was an alloy to their dignity, and might serve as a check to their pride: many there were who were its glories, but here was one that was its reproach. Let not the best families think it strange if there be those found in them, and descending from them, that prove their grief and shame. Judah was to have the first and largest lot in Canaan; the more inexcusable is one of that tribe if, not content to wait for his own share, he break in upon God's property. The Jews' tradition is that when the tribe of Judah was taken the valiant men of that tribe drew their swords, and professed they would not sheathe them again till they saw the criminal

punished and themselves cleared who knew their own innocency. 2. That the guilty person was at length fastened upon, and the language of the lot was, *Thou art the man*, v. 18. It was strange that Achan, being conscious to himself of guilt, when he saw the lot come nearer and nearer to him, had not either the wit to make an escape or the grace to make a confession; but *his heart was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*, and it proved to be *to his own destruction*. We may well imagine how his countenance changed, and what horror and confusion seized him when he was singled out as the delinquent, when the eyes of all Israel were fastened upon him, and every one was ready to say, *Have we found thee, O our enemy?* See here, (1.) The folly of those that promise themselves secrecy in sin: the righteous God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness, and so bringing to shame and ruin those that continue their fellowship with those unfruitful works. *A bird of the air*, when God pleases, shall *carry the voice*, Eccl. x. 20. See Ps. xciv. 7, &c. (2.) How much it is our concern, when God is contending with us, to find out what the cause of action is, what the particular sin is, that, like Achan, troubles our camp. We must thus examine ourselves and carefully review the records of conscience, that we may find out the accursed thing, and pray earnestly with holy Job, *Lord, show me wherefore thou contendest with me*. Discover the traitor and he shall be no longer harboured.

II. His arraignment and examination, v. 19. Joshua sits judge, and, though abundantly satisfied of his guilt by the determination of the lot, yet urges him to make a penitent confession, that his soul might be saved by it in the other world, though he could not give him any encouragement to hope that he should save his life by it. Observe, 1. How he accosts him with the greatest mildness and tenderness that could be, like a true disciple of Moses. He might justly have called him "thief," and "rebel," "Raca," and "thou fool," but he calls him "son;" he might have adjured him to confess, as the high priest did our blessed Saviour, or threatened him with the torture to extort a confession, but for love's sake he rather beseeches him: *I pray thee make confession*. This is an example to all not to insult over those that are in misery, though they have brought themselves into it by their own wickedness, but to treat even offenders with the spirit of meekness, not knowing what we ourselves should have been and done if God had put us into the hands of our own counsels. It is likewise an example to magistrates, in executing justice, to govern their own passions with a strict and prudent hand, and never suffer themselves to be transported by them into any indecencies of behaviour or language, no, not towards those

that have given the greatest provocations. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* Let them remember *the judgment is God's, who is Lord of his anger.* This is the likeliest method of bringing of offenders to repentance. 2. What he wishes him to do, to confess the fact, to confess it to God, the party offended by the crime; Joshua was to him in God's stead, so that in confessing to him he confessed to God. Hereby he would satisfy Joshua and the congregation concerning that which was laid to his charge; his confession would also be an evidence of his repentance, and a warning to others to take heed of sinning after the similitude of his transgression: but that which Joshua aims at herein is that God might be honoured by it, as the Lord, the God of infinite knowledge and power, from whom no secrets are hid; and as the God of Israel, who, as he does particularly resent affronts given to his Israel, so he does the affronts given him by Israel. Note, In confessing sin, as we take shame to ourselves, so we give glory to God as a righteous God, owning him justly displeased with us, and as a good God, who will not improve our confessions as evidences against us, but is faithful and just to forgive when we are brought to own that he would be faithful and just if he should punish. By sin we have injured God in his honour. Christ by his death has made satisfaction for the injury; but it is required that we by repentance show our good will to his honour, and, as far as in us lies, give glory to him. Bishop Patrick quotes the Samaritan chronicle, making Joshua to say here to Achan, *Lift up thy eyes to the king of heaven and earth, and acknowledge that nothing can be hidden from him who knoweth the greatest secrets.*

III. His confession, which now at last, when he saw it was to no purpose to conceal his crime, was free and ingenuous enough, *v. 20, 21.* Here is, 1. A penitent acknowledgment of the fault. "Indeed I have sinned; what I am charged with is too true to be denied and too had to be excused. I own it, I lament it; the Lord is righteous in bringing it to light, for indeed I have sinned." This is the language of a penitent that is sick of his sin, and whose conscience is loaded with it. "I have nothing to accuse any one else of, but a great deal to say against myself; it is with me that the accursed thing is found; I am the man who has *perverted that which was right and it profited me not.*" And that wherewith he aggravates the sin is that it was committed *against the Lord God of Israel.* He was himself an Israelite, a sharer with the rest of that exalted nation in their privileges, so that, in offending the God of Israel, he offended his own God, which laid him under the guilt of the basest treachery and ingratitude imaginable. 2. A particular narrative of the fact: *Thus and thus have I done.* God had told Joshua in general that a part of the devoted things was

alienated, but leaves it to him to draw from Achan an account of the particulars; for, one way or other, God will make sinners' own tongues to fall upon them (Ps. lxiv. 8); if ever he bring them to repentance, they will be their own accusers, and their awakened consciences will be instead of a thousand witnesses. Note, It becomes penitents, in the confession of their sins to God, to be very particular; not only, "I have sinned," but, "In this and that instance I have sinned," reflecting with regret upon all the steps that led to the sin and all the circumstances that aggravated it and made it exceedingly sinful: *thus and thus have I done.* He confesses, (1.) To the things taken. In plundering a house in Jericho he found a goodly Babylonish garment; the word signifies a robe, such as princes wore when they appeared in state, probably it belonged to the king of Jericho; it was far fetched, if fetched, as we translate it, from *Babylon.* A garment of divers colours, so some render it. Whatever it was, in his eyes it made a very glorious show. "A thousand pities" (thinks Achan) "that it should be burnt; then it will do nobody any good; if I take it for myself, it will serve me many a year for my best garment." Under these pretences, he makes hold with this first, and thinks it no harm to save it from the fire; but, his hand being thus in, he proceeds to take a bag of money, *two hundred shekels,* that is, one hundred ounces of silver, and a *wedge of gold* which weighed *fifty shekels,* that is, twenty-five ounces. He could not plead that, in taking these, he saved them *from the fire* (for the silver and gold were to be laid up in the treasury); but those that make a slight excuse to serve in daring to commit one sin will have their hearts so hardened by it that they will venture upon the next without such an excuse; for the way of sin is downhill. See what a poor prize it was for which Achan ran this desperate hazard, and what an unspeakable loser he was by the bargain. See Matt. xvi. 26. (2.) He confesses the manner of taking them. [1.] The sin began in the eye. He saw these fine things, as Eve saw the forbidden fruit, and was strangely charmed with the sight. See what comes of suffering the heart to walk after the eyes, and what need we have to make this covenant with our eyes, that if they wander they shall be sure to weep for it. *Look not thou upon the wine that is red,* upon the woman that is fair; close the right eye that thus offends thee, to prevent the necessity of plucking it out, and casting it from thee, Matt. v. 28, 29. [2.] It proceeded out of the heart. He owns, *I coveted them.* Thus lust conceived and brought forth this sin. Those that would be kept from sinful actions must mortify and check in themselves sinful desires, particularly the desire of worldly wealth, which we more particularly call *covetousness.* O what a world of evil is the love

of money the root of! Had Achan looked upon these things with an eye of faith, he would have seen them accursed things, and would have dreaded them, but, looking upon them with an eye of sense only, he saw them goodly things, and coveted them. It was not the looking, but the lusting that ruined him. [3.] When he had committed it he was very industrious to conceal it. Having taken of the forbidden treasures, fearing lest any search should be made for prohibited goods, he hid them in the earth, as one that resolved to keep what he had gotten, and never to make restitution. Thus does Achan confess the whole matter, that God might be justified in the sentence passed upon him. See the *deceitfulness of sin*; that which is pleasing in the commission is bitter in the reflection; at the last it bites like a serpent. Particularly, see what comes of ill-gotten goods, and how those will be cheated that rob God. Job xx. 15, *He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again.*

IV. His conviction. God had convicted him by the lot; he had convicted himself by his own confession; but, that no room might be left for the most discontented Israelite to object against the process, Joshua has him further convicted by the searching of his tent, in which the goods were found which he confessed to. Particular notice is taken of the haste which the messengers made that were sent to search: *They ran to the tent* (v. 22), not only to show their readiness to obey Joshua's orders, but to show how uneasy they were till the camp was cleared of the accursed thing, that they might regain the divine favour. Those that feel themselves under wrath find themselves concerned not to defer the putting away of sin. Delays are dangerous, and it is no time to trifle. When the stolen goods were brought they were laid out before the Lord (v. 23), that all Israel might see how plain the evidence was against Achan, and might adore the strictness of God's judgments in punishing so severely the stealing of such small things, and yet the justice of his judgments in maintaining his right to devoted things, and might be afraid of ever offending in the like kind. In laying them out before the Lord they acknowledged his title to them, and waited to receive his directions concerning them. Note, Those that think to put a cheat upon God do but deceive themselves; what is taken from him he will recover (Hos. ii. 9) and he will be a loser by no man at last.

V. His condemnation. Joshua passes sentence upon him (v. 25): *Why hast thou troubled us?* There is the ground of the sentence. *O, how much hast thou troubled us!* so some read it. He refers to what was said when the warning was given not to meddle with the accursed thing (ch. vi. 18), *lest you make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it.* Note, Sin is a very troublesome thing, not only to the sinner himself, but to

all about him. *He that is greedy of gain, as Achan was, troubles his own house* (Prov. xv. 27) and all the communities he belongs to. Now (says Joshua) *God shall trouble thee.* See why Achan was so severely dealt with, not only because he had robbed God, but because he had troubled Israel; over his head he had (as it were) this accusation written, "*Achan, the troubler of Israel,*" as Ahab, 1 Kings xviii. 18. This therefore is his doom: *God shall trouble thee.* Note, The righteous God will certainly recompense tribulation to those that trouble his people, 2 Thess. i. 6. Those that are troublesome shall be troubled. Some of the Jewish doctors, from that word which determines the troubling of him to *this day*, infer that therefore he should not be troubled in the world to come; the flesh was destroyed that the spirit might be saved, and, if so, the dispensation was really less severe than it seemed. In the description both of his sin and of his punishment, by the trouble that was in both, there is a plain allusion to his name *Achan*, or, as he is called, 1 Chron. ii. 7, *Achar*, which signifies *trouble*. He did too much answer his name.

VI. His execution. No reprieve could be obtained; a gangrened member must be cut off immediately. When he is proved to be an anathema, and the troubler of the camp, we may suppose all the people cry out against him, *Away with him, away with him! Stone him, stone him! Here is,*

1. The place of execution. They brought him out of the camp, in token of their putting far from them that wicked person, 1 Cor. v. 13. When our Lord Jesus was made a curse for us, that by his trouble we might have peace, he suffered as an accursed thing *without the gate*, bearing our reproach, Heb. xiii. 12, 13. The execution was at a distance, that the camp which was disturbed by Achan's sin might not be defiled by his death.

2. The persons employed in his execution. It was the act of all Israel, v. 24, 25. They were all spectators of it, that they might see and fear. Public executions are public examples. Nay, they were all consenting to his death, and as many as could were active in it, in token of the universal detestation in which they held his sacrilegious attempt, and their dread of God's displeasure against them.

3. The partakers with him in the punishment; for he perished not alone in his iniquity, ch. xxii. 20. (1.) The stolen goods were destroyed with him, the garment burnt, as it should have been with the rest of the combustible things in Jericho, and the silver and gold defaced, melted, lost, and buried, in the ashes of the rest of his goods under the heap of stones, so as never to be put to any other use. (2.) All his other goods were destroyed likewise, not only his tent, and the furniture of that, but his *oren, asses, and sheep*, to show that goods gotten unjustly, especially if they be gotten by sacrifice, will not only

turn to no account, but will blast and waste the rest of the possessions to which they are added. The eagle in the fable, that stole flesh from the altar, brought a coal of fire with it, which burnt her nest, Hab. ii. 9, 10; Zech. v. 3, 4. Those lose their own that grasp at more than their own. (3.) His sons and daughters were put to death with him. Some indeed think that they were brought out (v. 24) only to be the spectators of their father's punishment, but most conclude that they died with him, and that they must be meant v. 25, where it is said they *burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones*. God had expressly provided that magistrates should not put the children to death for the fathers' sins; but he did not intend to bind himself by that law, and in this case he had expressly ordered (v. 15) that the criminal, and all that he had, should be burnt. Perhaps his sons and daughters were aiders and abettors in the villany, had helped to carry off the accursed thing. It is very probable that they assisted in the concealment, and that he could not hide them in the midst of his tent but they must know and keep his counsel, and so they became accessories *ex post facto*—after the fact; and, if they were ever so little partakers in the crime, it was so heinous that they were justly sharers in the punishment. However God was hereby glorified, and the judgment executed was thus made the more tremendous.

4. The punishment itself that was inflicted on him. He was stoned (some think as a sabbath breaker, supposing that the sacrilege was committed on the sabbath day), and then his dead body was burnt, as an accursed thing, of which there should be no remainder left. The concurrence of all the people in this execution teaches us how much it is the interest of a nation that all in it should contribute what they can, in their places, to the suppression of vice and profaneness, and the reformation of manners; *sin is a reproach to any people*, and therefore every Israelite indeed will have a stone to throw at it.

5. The pacifying of God's wrath hereby (v. 26): *The Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger*. The putting away of sin by true repentance and reformation, as it is the only way, so it is a sure and most effectual way, to recover the divine favour. Take away the cause, and the effect will cease.

VII. The record of his conviction and execution. Care was taken to preserve the remembrance of it, for warning and instruction to posterity. 1. A heap of stones was raised on the place where Achan was executed, every one perhaps of the congregation throwing a stone to the heap, in token of his detestation of the crime. 2. A new name was given to the place; it was called the *Valley of Achor*, or *trouble*. This was a perpetual brand of infamy upon Achan's name, and a perpetual warning to all people not to invade God's property. By this se-

verity against Achan, the honour of Joshua's government, now in the infancy of it, was maintained, and Israel, at their entrance upon the promised Canaan, were reminded to observe, at their peril, the provisos and limitations of the grant by which they held it. The *Valley of Achor* is said to be given for a *door of hope*, because when we put away the accursed thing then there begins to be hope in Israel, Hos. ii. 15; Ezra x. 2.

## CHAP. VIII.

The embarrassment which Achan's sin gave to the affairs of Israel being over, we have them here in a very good posture again, the affairs both of war and religion. Here is, 1. The glorious progress of their arms in the taking of Ai, before which they had lately suffered disgrace. 2. God encourages Joshua to attack it, with the assurance of success, and directs him what method to take, ver. 1, 2. 3. Joshua gives orders accordingly to the men of war, ver. 3—8. 4. The stratagem is managed as it was projected, and succeeds as it was desired, ver. 9—22. 5. Joshua becomes master of this city, puts all the inhabitants to the sword, burns it, hangs the king, but gives the plunder to the soldiers, ver. 23—29. 6. The great solemnity of writing and reading the law before a general assembly of all Israel, drawn up for that purpose upon the two mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, according to an order which Moses had received from the Lord, and delivered to them, ver. 30—35. Thus did they take their work before them, and make the business of their religion to keep pace with their secular business.

AND the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land: 2 And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it.

Israel were very happy in having such a commander as Joshua, but Joshua was more happy in having such a director as God himself; when any difficulty occurred, he needed not to call a council of war who had *God so nigh unto him*, not only to answer, but even to anticipate, his enquiries. It should seem, Joshua was now at a stand, had scarcely recovered the discomposure he was put into by the trouble Achan gave them, and could not think, without fear and trembling, of pushing forward, lest there should be in the camp another Achan; then God spoke to him, either by vision, as before (ch. v.), as a man of war with his sword drawn, or by the breastplate of judgment. Note, When we have faithfully put away sin, that accursed thing, which *separates between us and God*, then, and not till then, we may expect to hear from God to our comfort; and God's directing us how to go on in our Christian work and warfare is a good evidence of his being reconciled to us. Observe here,

1. The encouragement God gives to Joshua to proceed: *Fear not, neither be thou dismayed*, v. 1. This intimates that the sin of Achan, and the consequences of it, had been a very great discouragement to Joshua, and made his heart almost ready to fail. Corruptions within the church weaken the hands,

and damp the spirits, of her guides and helpers, more than oppositions from without; treacherous Israelites are to be dreaded more than malicious Canaanites. But God bids Joshua not be dismayed; the same power that keeps Israel from being ruined by their enemies shall keep them from ruining themselves. To animate him, 1. He assures him of success against Ai, tells him it is all his own; but he must take it as God's gift: *I have given it into thy hands*, which secured him both title and possession, and obliged him to give God the glory of both, Ps. xlv. 3. 2. He allows the people to take the spoil to themselves. Here the spoil was not consecrated to God as that of Jericho, and therefore there was no danger of the people's committing such a trespass as they had committed there. Observe, How Achan who caught at forbidden spoil lost that, and life, and all, but the rest of the people who had conscientiously refrained from the accursed thing were quickly recompensed for their obedience with the spoil of Ai. The way to have the comfort of what God allows us is to forbear what he forbids us. No man shall lose by his self-denial; let God have his dues first, and then all will be clean to us and sure. 1 Kings xvii. 13. God did not bring them to these *goodly cities*, and *houses filled with all good things*, to tantalize them with the sight of that which they might not touch; but, having received the first-fruits from Jericho, the spoil of Ai, and of all the cities which thenceforward came into their hands, they might take for a prey to themselves.

II. The direction he gives him in attacking Ai. It must not be such a work of time as the taking of Jericho was; this would have prolonged the war too much. Those that had patiently waited seven days for Jericho shall have Ai given them in one day. Nor was it, as that, to be taken by miracle, and purely by the act of God, but now their own conduct and courage must be exercised; having seen God work for them, they must now bestir themselves. God directs him, 1. To take all the people, that they might all be spectators of the action and sharers in the spoil. Hereby God gave him a tacit rebuke for sending so small a detachment against Ai in the former attempt upon it, *ch. vii. 4.* 2. To lay an ambush behind the city; this was a method which perhaps Joshua would not have thought of at this time, if God had not directed him to it; and though now we are not to expect direction, as here, by visions, voices, or oracles, yet, whenever those who are entrusted with public councils take prudent measures for the public good, it must be acknowledged that God puts it into their hearts; he that teaches the husbandman discretion no doubt teaches the statesman and general.

3 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand

mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, *even* behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready: 5 And I, and all the people that *are* with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them, 6 (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them. 7 Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, *that* ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you. 9 Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people. 10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people, *even the people* of war that *were* with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now *there was* a valley between them and Ai. 12 And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. 13 And when they had set the people, *even* all the host that *was* on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley. 14 And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw *it*, that they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that *there were* liers in ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and

all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. 17 And there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel. 18 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. 19 And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand: and they entered into the city, and took it, and hastened and set the city on fire. 20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way: and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers. 21 And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai. 22 And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

We have here an account of the taking of Ai by stratagem. The stratagem here used, we are sure, was lawful and good; God himself appointed it, and we have no reason to think but that the like is lawful and good in other wars. Here was no league broken, no oath or promise violated, nor any thing like it; it was not by the pretence of a parley, or treaty of peace, that the advantage was gained; no, these are sacred things, and not to be jested with, nor used to serve a turn; truth, when once it is plighted, becomes a debt even to the enemy. But in this stratagem here was no untruth told; nothing was concealed but their own counsels, which no enemy ever pretended a right to be entrusted with; nothing was dissembled, nothing counterfeited but a retreat, which was no natural or necessary indication at all of their inability to

maintain their onset, or of any design not to renew it. The enemy ought to have been upon their guard, and to have kept within the defence of their own walls. Common prudence, had they been governed by it, would have directed them not to venture on the pursuit of an army which they saw was so far superior to them in numbers, and leave their city unguarded; but (*si populus vult decipi, decipiatur*--if the people will be deceived, let them) if the Canaanites will be so easily imposed upon, and in pursuit of God's Israel will break through all the laws of policy and good management, the Israelites are not at all to be blamed for taking advantage of their fury and thoughtlessness; nor is it any way inconsistent with the character God is pleased to give of them, that they are *children that will not lie*. Now in the account here given of this matter,

I. There is some difficulty in adjusting the numbers that were employed to effect it. Mention is made (v. 3) of 30,000 that were *chosen and sent away by night*, to whom the charge was given to surprise the city as soon as ever they perceived it was evacuated, v. 4, 7, 8. And yet afterwards (v. 12) it is said, Joshua took 5000 men and set them to lie in ambush behind the city, and that ambush entered the city, and set it on fire, v. 19. Now, 1. Some think there were two parties sent out to lie in ambush, 30,000 first, and afterwards 5000 to guard the roads, and to intercept those of the city that might think to save themselves by flight, or to strengthen those that were first sent out; and that Joshua made his open attack upon the city with all the thousands of Israel. So the learned bishop Patrick, insisting upon God's command (v. 1) to take all the people of war with him. But, 2. Others think that all the people were taken only to encamp before the city, and that out of them Joshua chose out 30,000 men to be employed in the action, out of which he sent out 5000 to lie in ambush, which were as many as could be supposed to march *incognito*--without being discovered (more would have been seen, and thus the design would have been broken), and that then with the other 25,000 he made the open attack, as Madius thinks, or with the 30,000, which, as Calvin thinks, he kept entire for that purpose, having, besides them, sent out 5000 for an ambuscade. And those 5000 (they think) must be meant by those (v. 3) whom he sent away by night, with orders to lie in wait behind the city, though the particular number is not specified till v. 12. If we admit such a seeming disturbance in the order of the narrative (of which, perhaps, similar instances might be cited from the other scripture histories), it seems most probable that there was but one ambushment, which consisted only of 5000, enough for such a purpose.

II. Yet the principal parts of the story are plain enough, that a detachment being se-

cretly marched behind the city, on the other side to that on which the main body of the army lay (the situation of the country, it is probable, favouring their concealment), Joshua, and the forces with him, faced the city; the garrison made a vigorous sally out upon them, whereupon they withdrew, gave ground, and retreated in some seeming disorder towards the wilderness, which being perceived by the men of Ai, they drew out all the force they had to pursue them. This gave a fair opportunity for those that lay in ambush to make themselves masters of the city, whereof when they had given notice by a smoke to Joshua, he, with all his force, returned upon the pursuers, who now, when it was too late, were aware of the snare they were drawn into, and, their retreat being intercepted, they were every man of them cut off. The like artifice we find used, Judg. xx. 30, &c. Now in this story we may observe,

1. What a brave commander Joshua was. See, (1.) His conduct and prudence. God gave him the hint (*v.* 2) that he should lay an ambush behind the city, but left him to himself to order the particulars, which he did admirably well. Doubtless *wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men*, Eccl. vii. 19. (2.) His care and industry (*v.* 10): *He rose up early in the morning*, that he might lose no time, and to show how intent his mind was upon his business. Those that would maintain their spiritual conflicts must not love their ease. (3.) His courage and resolution; though an army of Israelites had been repulsed before Ai, yet he resolves to lead them on in person the second time, *v.* 5. Being himself also an elder, he took the elders of Israel with him to make this attack upon the city (*v.* 10), as if he were going rather to sit in judgment upon them as criminals than to fight them as enemies. (4.) His caution and consideration (*v.* 13): *He went that night into the midst of the valley*, to make the necessary dispositions for an attack, and to see that every thing was in good order. It is the pious conjecture of the learned bishop Patrick that he went into the valley alone, to pray to God for a blessing upon his enterprise, and he did not seek in vain. (5.) His constancy and perseverance; when he had stretched out his spear towards the city (*v.* 18, a spear almost as fatal and formidable to the enemies of Israel as the rod of Moses was) he never drew back his hand till the work was done. His hands in fighting, like Moses's in interceding, were steady till the going down of the sun. Those that have stretched out their hands against their spiritual enemies must never draw them back. *Lastly*, What Joshua did in the stratagem is applicable to our Lord Jesus, of whom he was a type. Joshua conquered by yielding, as if he had himself been conquered; so our Lord Jesus, when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, seemed as if death had triumphed over him, and as if he and all his interests had been

routed and ruined); but in his resurrection he rallied again and gave the powers of darkness a total defeat; he broke the serpent's head, by suffering him to bruise his heel. A glorious stratagem!

2. What an obedient people Israel was: What *Joshua commanded them to do, according to the commandment of the Lord* (*v.* 8), they did it without murmuring or disputing. Those that were sent to lie in ambush between Beth-el and Ai (two cities confederate against them) were in a post of danger, and had they been discovered might all have been cut off, and yet they ventured; and, when the body of the army retreated and fled, it was both disgraceful and perilous, and yet, in obedience to Joshua, they did it.

3. What an infatuated enemy the king of Ai was, (1.) That he did not by his scouts discover those that lay in ambush behind the city, *v.* 14. Some observe it as a remarkable instance of the power of God in making men blind to their own interest, and the things that belong to their peace, that *he wist not that there were liers in wait against him*. Those are most in danger who are least aware that they are so. (2.) That when Israel seemed to fly he drew out all his forces to pursue them, and left none to guard his city and to secure his retreat, *v.* 17. Thus the church's enemies often run themselves into destruction by their own fury and the violence of their rage against the Israel of God. Pharaoh plunged himself into the Red Sea by the eagerness with which he pursued Israel. (3.) That from the killing of thirty-six men out of 3000, when Israel made the former attack upon his city, he should infer the total routing of so great an army as now he had to deal with (*v.* 6): *They flee before us as at the first*. See how the prosperity of fools destroys them and hardens them to their ruin. God had made use of the men of Ai as a scourge to chastise his people for meddling with the accursed thing, and this had puffed them up with a conceit that they must have the honour of delivering their country from these formidable invaders; but they were soon made to see their mistake, and that when the Israelites had reconciled themselves to their God they could have no power against them. God had made use of them only for the rebuking of Israel, with a purpose, when the correction was over, to throw the rod itself into the fire; *howbeit, they meant not so, but it was in their heart to destroy and cut off*, Isa. x. 5-7.

4. What a complete victory Israel obtained over them by the favour and blessing of God. Each did his part: the divided forces of Israel, by signals agreed on, understood one another, and every thing succeeded according to the project; so that the men of Ai, even when they were most confident of victory, found themselves surrounded, so that they had neither spirit to resist nor room to fly, but were under a fatal necessity of yield-



ing their lives to the destroyers. And now it is hard to say whether the shouts of the men of Israel, or the shrieks of the men of Ai, were the louder, but easy to imagine what terror and confusion they were filled with, when their highest assurances sunk so suddenly into the heaviest despair. Note, The triumphing of the wicked is short, Job xx. 5. They are *exalted for a little while*, that their fall and ruin may be the sorer, Job xxiv. 24. See how easily, how quickly, the scale turns against those that have not God on their side.

23 And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. 24 And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. 25 And so it was, *that all that fell that day*, both of men and women, *were* twelve thousand, *even* all the men of Ai. 26 For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27 Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua. 28 And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it a heap for ever, *even* a desolation unto this day. 29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, *that remaineth* unto this day.

We have here an account of the improvement which the Israelites made of their victory over Ai. 1. They put all to the sword, not only in the field, but in the city, man, woman, and child, none of them remained, v. 24. God, the righteous Judge, had passed this sentence upon them for their wickedness, so that the Israelites were only the ministers of his justice and the executioners of his doom. Once in this story, and but once, mention is made of the men of Beth-el, as confederates with the men of Ai, v. 17. Though they had a king of their own, and were not subjects to the king of Ai (for the

king of Beth-el is reckoned among the thirty-one kings that Joshua destroyed, ch. xii. 16), yet Ai being a stronger place they threw themselves into that, for their own safety, and the strengthening of their neighbours' hands, and so (we may presume) were all cut off with them; thus that by which they hoped to prevent their own ruin hastened it. The whole number of the slain, it seems, was but 12,000, an inconsiderable body to make head against all the thousands of Israel; but those whom God will destroy he infatuates. Here it is said (v. 26) that *Joshua drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out the spear* (v. 18) till the slaughter was completed. Some think the spear he stretched out was not to slay the enemies, but to animate and encourage his own soldiers, some flag or ensign being hung out at the end of this spear; and they observe it as an instance of his self-denial that though the fire of courage wherewith his breast was filled would have pushed him forward, sword in hand, into the hottest of the action, yet, in obedience to God, he kept the inferior post of a standard-bearer, and did not quit it till the work was done. By the spear stretched out, he directed the people to expect their help from God, and to him to give the praise. 2. They plundered the city and took all the spoil to themselves, v. 27. Thus the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just; the spoil they brought out of Egypt, by borrowing of their neighbours, was much of it expended upon the tabernacle they had reared in the wilderness, for which they are now reimbursed with interest. The spoil here taken, it is probable, was all brought together, and distributed by Joshua in due proportions, as that of the Midianites was, Num. xxxi. 26, &c. It was not seized with irregularity or violence, for God is the God of order and equity, and not of confusion. 3. They laid the city in ashes, and left it to remain so, v. 28. Israel must yet dwell in tents, and therefore this city, as well as Jericho, must be burnt. And, though there was no curse entailed upon him that should rebuild it, yet, it seems, it was not rebuilt, unless it be the same with Ajah, which we read of, long after, Neh. xi. 31. Some think it was not rebuilt because Israel had received a defeat before it, the remembrance of which should be buried in the ruins of the city. 4. The king of Ai was taken prisoner and cut off, not by the sword of war as a soldier, but by the sword of justice as a malefactor. Joshua ordered him to be hanged, and his dead body thrown at the gate of his own city, *under a heap of stones*, v. 23, 29. Some particular reason, no doubt, there was for this severity against the king of Ai; it is likely he had been notoriously wicked and vile, and a blasphemer of the God of Israel, perhaps upon occasion of the repulse he had given to the forces of Israel in their first onset. Some observe that his dead body was thrown at the gate where he

had been wont to sit in judgment that so much the greater contempt might thereby be poured upon the dignity he had been proud of, and he might be punished for the unrighteous decrees he had made in the very place where he had made them. Thus the Lord is known by the judgments which he executes.

30 Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, 31 As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up *any* iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. 32 And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel. 33 And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

This religious solemnity of which we have here an account comes in somewhat surprisingly in the midst of the history of the wars of Canaan. After the taking of Jericho and Ai, we should have expected that the next news would be of their taking possession of the country, the pushing on of their victories in other cities, and the carrying of the war into the bowels of the nation, now that they had made themselves masters of these frontier towns. But here a scene opens of quite another nature; the camp of Israel is drawn out into the field, not to engage the enemy, but to offer sacrifice, to hear the law read, and to say *Amen* to the blessings and

the curses. Some think this was not done till after some of the following victories were obtained which we read of, *ch. x. and xi.* But it should seem by the maps that Shechem (near to which these two mountains Gerizim and Ebal were) was not so far off from Ai but that when they had taken that they might penetrate into the country as far as those two mountains, and therefore I would not willingly admit a transposition of the story: and the rather because, as it comes in here, it is a remarkable instance, 1. Of the zeal of Israel for the service of God and for his honour. Though never was war more honourable, more pleasant, or more gainful, nor ever was war more sure of victory, or more necessary to a settlement (for they had neither houses nor lands of their own till they had won them by the sword, no, not Joshua himself), yet all the business of the war shall stand still, while they make a long march to the place appointed, and there attend this solemnity. God appointed them to do this when they should have got over Jordan, and they did it as soon as possibly they could, though they might have had a colourable pretence to put it off. Note, We must not think to defer our covenanting with God till we are settled in the world, nor must any business put us by from minding and pursuing the one thing needful. The way to prosper is to begin with God, *Matt. vi. 33.* 2. It is an instance of the care of God concerning his faithful servants and worshippers. Though they were in an enemy's country, as yet unconquered, yet in the service of God they were safe, as Jacob when in this very country he was going to Beth-el to pay his vows: *the terror of God was upon the cities round about, Gen. xxxv. 5.* Note, When we are in the way of duty God takes us under his special protection.

Twice Moses had given express orders for this solemnity; once *Deut. xi. 29, 30*, where he seems to have pointed to the very place where it was to be performed; and again *Deut. xxvii. 2, &c.* It was a federal transaction: the covenant was now renewed between God and Israel upon their taking possession of the land of promise, that they might be encouraged in the conquest of it, and might know upon what terms they held it, and come under fresh obligations to obedience. In token of the covenant,

1. They built an altar, and offered sacrifice to God (*r. 30, 31*), in token of their dedication of themselves to God, as living sacrifices to his honour, in and by a Mediator, who is the altar that sanctifies this gift. This altar was erected on Mount *Ebal*, the mount on which the curse was put (*Deut. xi. 29*), to signify that there, where by the law we had reason to expect a curse, by Christ's sacrifice of himself for us and his mediation we have peace with God; he has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a *curse for us, Gal. iii. 13.* Even where it was

said, by the curse, *You are not my people*, here it is said, through Christ the altar, *You are the children of the living God*, Hos. i. 10. The curses pronounced on Mount Ebal would immediately have been executed if atonement had not been made by sacrifice. By the sacrifices offered on this altar they did likewise give God the glory of the victories they had already obtained, as Exod. xvii. 15. Now that they had had the comfort of them, in the spoils of Ai, it was fit that God should have the praise of them. And they also implored his favour for their future success; for supplications as well as thanksgivings were intended in their peace-offerings. The way to prosper in all that we put our hand to is to take God along with us, and in all our ways to acknowledge him by prayer, praise, and dependence. The altar they built was of rough unhewn stone, according to the law (Exod. xx. 25), for that which is most plain and natural, and least artful and affected, in the worship of God, he is best pleased with. Man's device can add no beauty to God's institutions.

II. They received the law from God; and this those must do that would find favour with him, and expect to have their offerings accepted; for, if we turn away our ear from hearing the law, our prayers will be an abomination. When God took Israel into covenant he gave them his law, and they, in token of their consent to the covenant, subjected themselves to the law. Now here,

1. The law of the ten commandments was written upon stones in the presence of all Israel, as an abridgment of the whole, v. 32. This copy was not graven in the stone, as that which was reserved in the ark: that was to be done only by the finger of God; it is his prerogative to write the law in the heart. But the stones were plastered, and it was written upon the plaster, Deut. xxvii. 4, 8. It was written, that all might see what it was that they consented to, and that it might be a standing remaining testimony to posterity of God's goodness in giving them such good laws, and a testimony against them if they were disobedient to them. It is a great mercy to any people to have the law of God in writing, and it is fit that the written law should be exposed to common view in a known tongue, that it may be seen and read of all men.

2. The blessings and the curses, the sanctions of the law, were publicly read, and the people (we may suppose), according to Moses's appointment, said *Amen* to them, v. 33, 34.

(1.) The auditory was very large. [1.] The greatest prince was not excused. The elders, officers, and judges, are not above the cognizance of the law, but will come under the blessing or the curse, according as they are or are not obedient to it, and therefore they must be present to consent to the covenant and to go before the people therein. [2.] The poorest stranger was not

excluded. Here was a general naturalization of them: as well the stranger as he that was born among them was taken into covenant. This was an encouragement to proselytes, and a happy presage of the kindnesses intended for the poor Gentiles in the latter days.

(2.) The tribes were posted, as Moses directed, six towards Gerizim and six towards Ebal. And the ark in the midst of the valley was between them, for it was the *ark of the covenant*; and in it were shut up the close rolls of that law which was copied out and shown openly upon the stones. The covenant was commanded, and the command covenanted. The priests that attended the ark, or some of the Levites that attended them, after the people had all taken their places, and silence was proclaimed, pronounced distinctly the blessings and the curses, as Moses had drawn them up, to which the tribes said *Amen*; and yet it is here only said that they should *bless the people*, for the blessing was that which was first and chiefly intended, and which God designed in giving the law. If they fell under the curse, that was their own fault. And it was really a blessing to the people that they had this matter laid so plainly before them, *life and death, good and evil*; he had not dealt so with other nations.

3. The law itself also containing the precepts and prohibitions was read (v. 35), it should seem by Joshua himself, who did not think it below him to be a reader in the congregation of the Lord. In conformity to this example, the solemn reading of the law, which was appointed once in seven years (Deut. xxxi. 10, 11), was performed by their king or chief magistrate. It is here intimated what a general publication of the law this was. (1.) Every word was read; even the minutest precepts were not omitted, nor the most copious abridged; not one iota or tittle of the law shall pass away, and therefore none was, in reading, skipped over, under pretence of want of time, or that any part was needless or not proper to be read. It was not many weeks since Moses had preached the whole book of *Deuteronomy* to them, yet Joshua must now read it all over again; it is good to hear twice what God has spoken once (Ps. lxii. 11) and to review what has been delivered to us, or to have it repeated, that we may not let it slip. (2.) Every Israelite was present, even *the women and the little ones*, that all might know and do their duty. Note, Masters of families should bring their wives and children with them to the solemn assemblies for religious worship. All that are capable of learning must come to be *taught out of the law*. The strangers also attended with them; for wherever we are, though but as strangers, we should improve every opportunity of acquainting ourselves with God and his holy will.

## CHAP. IX.

Here is in this chapter, I. The impolitic confederacy of the kings of Canaan against Israel, ver. 1, 2. II. The impolitic confederacy of the inhabitants of Gibeon with Israel. 1. How it was subtly

proposed and petitioned for by the Gibeonites pretending to come from a far country, ver. 3—13. 7. How it was unwarily consented to by Joshua and the Israelites, to the disgust of the congregation when the fraud was discovered, ver. 14—18. 3. How the matter was adjusted to the satisfaction of all sides, by giving these Gibeonites their lives because they had covenanted with them, yet depriving them of their liberties because the covenant was not fairly obtained, ver. 19—27.

AND it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof; 2 That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord.

Hitherto the Canaanites had acted defensively; the Israelites were the aggressors upon Jericho and Ai. But here the kings of Canaan are in consultation to attack Israel, and concert matters for a vigorous effort of their united forces to check the progress of their victorious arms. Now, 1. It was strange they did not do this sooner. They had notice long since of their approach; Israel's design upon Canaan was no secret; one would have expected that a prudent concern for their common safety would put them upon taking some measures to oppose their coming over Jordan, and maintain that pass against them, or to give them a warm reception as soon as they were over. It was strange they did not attempt to raise the siege of Jericho, or at least fall in with the men of Ai, when they had given them a defeat. But they were, either through presumption or despair, wonderfully infatuated and at their wits' end. Many know not the things that belong to their peace till they are hidden from their eyes. 2. It was more strange that they did it now. Now that the conquest of Jericho had given such a pregnant proof of God's power, and that of Ai of Israel's policy, one would have thought the end of their consultation should be, not to fight with Israel, but to make peace with them, and to gain the best terms they could for themselves. This would have been their wisdom (Luke xiv. 32), but their minds were blinded, and their hearts hardened to their destruction. Observe, (1.) What induced them now at last to enter upon this consultation. When they heard thereof (v. 1), not only of the conquest of Jericho and Ai, but of the convention of the states of Mount Ebal, of which we have an account immediately before,—when they heard that Joshua, as if he thought himself already completely master of the country, had had all his people together, and had read the laws to them by which they must be governed, and taken their promises to submit to those laws,—then they perceived the Israelites were in good earnest, and thought it was high time for them to

bestir themselves. The pious devotion of God's people sometimes provokes and exasperates their enemies more than any thing else. (2.) How unanimous they were in their resolves. Though they were many kings of different nations, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, &c., doubtless of different interests, and that had often been at variance one with another, yet they determined, *ne mine contradicente—unanimously*, to unite against Israel. O that Israel would learn this of Canaanites, to sacrifice private interests to the public welfare, and to lay aside all animosities among themselves, that they may cordially unite against the common enemies of God's kingdom among men!

3 And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, 4 They did work wilyly, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; 5 And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. 6 And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. 7 And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? 8 And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye? 9 And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, 10 And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroath. 11 Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. 12 This our bread we took out for our provision out of our houses on the day

we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: 13 And these bottles of wine, which we filled, *were* new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey. 14 And the men took of their victuals, and asked not *counsel* at the mouth of the LORD.

Here, I. The Gibeonites desire to make peace with Israel, being alarmed by the tidings they heard of the destruction of Jericho, v. 3. Other people heard those tidings, and were irritated thereby to make war upon Israel; but the Gibeonites heard them and were induced to make peace with them. Thus the discovery of the glory and grace of God in the gospel is to some a *savour of life unto life, but to others a savour of death unto death*, 2 Cor. ii. 16. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay. I do not remember that we read any where of a king of Gibeon. Had their government been at this time in a single person, perhaps his heart would have been too high to yield to Israel, and he would have joined with the rest of the kings against Israel. But these four united cities (mentioned v. 17) seem to have been governed by elders, or senators (v. 11), who consulted the common safety more than their own personal dignity. The inhabitants of Gibeon did well for themselves. We have,

II. The method they took to compass it. They knew that all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan were to be cut off; perhaps they had some spies in the congregation at Ebal, when the law was read, who observed and brought them notice of the command given to Israel (Deut. vii. 1—3), that they should *show no mercy to the Canaanites, give them no quarter in battle, which made them afraid of fighting them, and that they should make no covenant with them, which made them despair of gaining any advantage by treating with them; and therefore there was no way of saving their lives from the sword of Israel unless they could, by disguising themselves, make Joshua believe that they came from some very far country, which the Israelites were not commanded to make war upon nor forbidden to make peace with, but were particularly appointed to offer peace to*, Deut. xx. 10, 15. Unless they could be admitted under this notion, they saw there was but one way with them: they must submit to the fate of Jericho and Ai. Though the neighbouring princes *knew that all the men thereof were mighty* (ch. x. 2), and they knew it themselves, yet they durst not contend with Israel, who had an Almighty God on their side. This therefore is the only game they have to play, and observe,

1. They play it very artfully and success-

fully. Never was any such thing more craftily managed.

(1.) They come under the character of ambassadors from a foreign state, which they thought would please the princes of Israel, and make them proud of the honour of being courted by distant countries: we find Hezekiah fond of those that came to him from a far country (Isa. xxxix. 3); they were not used to be thus courted.

(2.) They pretended to have undergone the fatigues of a very long journey, and produced what passed for an ocular demonstration of it. It should seem it was then usual for those that undertook long journeys to take with them, as we do now for long voyages, all manner of provision in kind, the country not being furnished as ours is now with houses of entertainment, for the convenience of which, when we have occasion to make use of them, we have reason to be very thankful. Now they here pretended that their provision, when they brought it from home, was fresh and new, but now it appeared to be old and dry, whereas it might well be presumed they had not loitered, but made the best of their way; so that hence it must be inferred that they came, as they said they did, from a very far country: their sacks or portmanteaus were old; the wine was all drunk, and the bottles in which it had been were broken; their shoes and clothes were worse than those of the Israelites in forty years, and their bread was mouldy, v. 4, 5, and again, v. 12, 13. Thus God's Israel have often been deceived and imposed upon with a show of antiquity. But (as bishop Hall expresses it) *errors are never the older for being patched, and so seeming old; but those that will be caught with this Gibeonitish stratagem prove they have not consulted with God. And thus there are those who make themselves poor with the badges of want and distress and yet have great riches* (Prov. xiii. 7), or at least have no need of relief, by which fraud charity is misplaced and diverted from those that are real objects of it.

(3.) When they were suspected, and more strictly examined as to whence they came, they industriously declined telling the name of their country, till the agreement was settled. [1.] The men of Israel suspected a fraud (v. 7): "*Peradventure you dwell among us, and then we may not, we must not, make any league with you.*" This might have discouraged the Gibeonites from urging the matter any further, concluding that if the peace were made the Israelites would not think themselves obliged to keep it, having thus solemnly protested against it in case they *dwell among them*; but, knowing that there was no hope at all if they stood it out, they bravely ventured a submission. "Who knows but the people of Israel may save us alive, though thus inveigled into a promise; and if we tell them at last we shall but die."

[2.] Joshua put the questions to them, *Who*

are you? and whence come you? He finds himself concerned to stand upon his guard against secret fraud as well as against open force. We in our spiritual warfare must stand against the wiles of the devil, remembering he is a subtle serpent as well as a roaring lion. In all leagues of relation and friendship we must first try and then trust, lest we repent at leisure agreements made in haste. [3.] They would not tell whence they came; but still repeat the same thing: *We have come from a very far country*, v. 9. They will have it thought that it is a country Joshua knows nothing of nor ever heard of, and therefore would be never the wiser if they should tell him the name of it.

(4.) They profess a respect for the God of Israel, the more to ingratiate themselves with Joshua, and we charitably believe they were sincere in this profession: "*We have come because of the name of the Lord thy God* (v. 9), because of what we have heard of that name, which has convinced us that it is *above every name*, and because we have a desire towards that name and the remembrance of it, and would gladly come under its protection."

(5.) They fetch their inducements from what had been done some time before in Moses's reign, the tidings whereof might easily be supposed ere this to have reached distant regions, the plagues of Egypt and the destruction of Sihon and Og (v. 9, 10), but prudently say nothing of the destruction of Jericho and Ai (though this was the true inducement, v. 3), because they will have it supposed that they came from home long before those conquests were made. We need not be long to seek for reasons why we should submit to the God of Israel; we may be furnished either with new or old, which we will.

(6.) They make a general submission—*We are your servants*; and humbly sue for a general agreement—*Make a league with us*, v. 11. They insist not upon terms, but will be glad of peace upon any terms; nor will the case admit of delays, lest the fraud be discovered; they would fain have the bargain struck up immediately; if Joshua will but *make a league* with them, they have all they come for, and they hope their ragged clothes and clouted shoes will be no exception against them. God and Israel reject none for their poverty. But,

2. There is a mixture of good and evil in their conduct. (1.) Their falsehood cannot be justified, nor ought it to be drawn into a precedent. We must not do evil that good may come. Had they owned their country but renounced the idolatries of it, resigning the possession of it to Israel and themselves to the God of Israel, we have reason to think Joshua would have been directed by the oracle of God to spare their lives, and they needed not to have made these pretensions. It is observable that when they had once said, *We have come from a far country* (v. 6),

they found themselves necessitated to say it again (v. 9), and to say what was utterly false concerning their bread, their bottles, and their clothes (v. 12, 13), for one lie is an inlet to another, and that to a third, and soon. The way of that sin is down-hill. But, (2.) Their faith and prudence are to be greatly commended. Our Lord commended even the unjust steward, because he had done wisely and well for himself, Luke xvi. 8. In submitting to Israel, they submitted to the God of Israel, which implied a renunciation of the god they had served, a resignation to the laws of the true religion. They had heard enough to convince them of the infinite power of the God of Israel, and thence might infer his other perfections of wisdom and goodness; and how can we do better for ourselves than surrender at discretion to infinite wisdom, and cast ourselves upon the mercy of a God of infinite goodness. The submission of these Gibeonites was the more laudable because it was, [1.] Singular. Their neighbours took another course, and expected they should join with them. [2.] Speedy. They did not stay till Israel had besieged their cities; then it would have been too late to capitulate; but when they were at some distance they desired conditions of peace. The way to avoid a judgment is to meet it by repentance. Let us imitate these Gibeonites, and make our peace with God in the rags of humiliation, godly sorrow, and mortification, so our iniquity shall not be our ruin. Let us be servants to Jesus, our blessed Joshua, and make a league with him and the Israel of God, and we shall live.

15 And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. 16 And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them. 17 And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim. 18 And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. 19 But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. 20 This we will do to

them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore unto them. 21 And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them.

Here is, I. The treaty soon concluded with the Gibeonites, v. 15. The thing was not done with much formality, but in short, 1. They agreed to let them live, and more the Gibeonites did not ask. In a common war this would have been but a small matter to be granted; but in the wars of Canaan, which were to make a general destruction, it was a great favour to a Canaanite to have his *life given him for a prey*, Jer. xlv. 5. 2. This agreement was made not by Joshua only, but by the princes of the congregation in conjunction with him. Though Joshua had an extraordinary call to the government, and extraordinary qualifications for it, yet he would not act in an affair of this nature without the counsel and concurrence of the princes, who were neither kept in the dark nor kept under foot, but were treated by him as sharers in the government. 3. It was ratified by an oath; they swore unto them, not by any of the gods of Canaan, but by the God of Israel only, v. 19. Those that mean honestly do not startle at assurances, but satisfy those with whom they treat, and glorify God by calling him to witness to the sincerity of their intentions. 4. Nothing appears to have been culpable in all this but that it was done rashly; they took of their victuals, by which they satisfied themselves that it was indeed old and dry, but did not consider that this was no proof of their bringing it fresh from home; so that, making use of their senses only, but not their reason, *they received the men* (as the margin reads it) *because of their victuals*, perceiving perhaps, upon the view and taste of their bread, not only that now it was old, but that it had been fine and very good at first, whence they inferred that they were persons of some quality, and therefore the friendship of their country was not to be despised. But *they asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord*. They had the Urim and Thummim with them, which they might have advised with in this difficult case, and which would have told them no lie, would have led them into no error; but they relied so much on their own politics that they thought it needless to bring the matter to the oracle. Joshua himself was not altogether without blame herein. Note, We make more haste than good speed in any business when we stay not to take God along with us, and by the word and prayer to consult him. Many a time we see cause to reflect upon it with regret that such and such an affair miscarried, because we

*asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord*, would we acknowledge him in all our ways, we should find them more safe, easy, and successful.

II. The fraud soon discovered, by which this league was procured. *A lying tongue is but for a moment*, and truth will be the daughter of time. Within three days they found, to their great surprise, that the cities which these ambassadors had treated for were very near them, but one night's foot-march from the camp at Gilgal, ch. x. 9. Either their own scouts or the parties that sallied out to acquaint themselves with the country, or perhaps some deserters that came over to them from the enemy, informed them of the truth in this matter. Those that suffer themselves to be deceived by the wiles of Satan will soon be undeceived by their confusion, and will find that near, even at the door, which they imagined was very far off.

III. The disgust of the congregation at this. They did indeed submit to the restraints which this league laid upon them, and smote not the cities of the Gibeonites, neither slew the persons nor seized the prey; but it vexed them to have their hands thus tied, and they *murmured against the princes* (v. 18), it is to be feared, more from a jealousy for their own profit than from a zeal for the fulfilling of God's command, though some of them perhaps had a regard to that. Many are forward to arraign and censure the actions of princes while they are ignorant of the springs of those actions and are incompetent judges of the reasons of state that govern them. While therefore we are satisfied in general that those who are over us aim at nothing but the public good, and sincerely seek the welfare of their people, we ought to make the best of what they do and not exercise ourselves in things above us.

IV. The prudent endeavour of the princes to pacify the discontented congregation, and to accommodate the matter; herein all the princes concurred and were unanimous, which doubtless disposed the people to acquiesce.

1. They resolved to spare the lives of the Gibeonites, for so they had expressly sworn to do (v. 15), to let them live. (1.) The oath was lawful, else it had not bound them any more than Herod's oath bound him to cut off John Baptist's head; it is true God had appointed them to destroy all the Canaanites, but that law must be construed, *in favorem vitæ—with some tender allowance*, to mean those only that stood it out and would not surrender their country to them, and not to bind them so far to put off the sense of honour and humanity as to slay those who had never lifted up a hand against them nor ever would, but before they were reduced to any extremity, or ever attempted any act of hostility, with one consent humbled themselves; *the kings of Israel were certainly*

more merciful kings than to do so (1 Kings xx. 31), and the God of Israel a more merciful God than to order it so. *Satis est prostrasse leoni—It is enough to have laid the lion prostrate.* And besides, the reason of the law is the law; the mischief designed to be prevented by that law was the infecting of the Israelites with their idolatry, Deut. vii. 4. But if the Gibeonites renounce their idolatry, and become friends and servants to the house of God, the danger is effectually prevented, the reason of the law ceases, and consequently the obligation of it, especially to a thing of this nature. The conversion of sinners shall prevent their ruin. (2.) The oath being lawful, both the princes and the people for whom they transacted were bound by it, bound in conscience, bound in honour to the God of Israel, by whom they had sworn, and whose name would have been blasphemed by the Canaanites if they had violated this oath. They speak as those that feared an oath (Ecl. ix. 2), when they argued thus: *We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore, v. 20.* He that ratifies a promise with an oath imprecates the divine vengeance if he wilfully break his promise, and has reason to expect that divine justice will take him at his word. God is not mocked, and therefore oaths are not to be jested with. The princes would keep their word, [1.] Though they lost by it. A citizen of Zion swears to his own hurt and changes not, Ps. xv. 4. Joshua and the princes, when they found it was to their prejudice that they had thus bound themselves, did not apply to Eleazar for a dispensation, much less did they pretend that no faith is to be kept with heretics, with Canaanites; no, they were strangers to the modern artifices of the Romish church to elude the most sacred bonds, and even to sanctify perjuries. [2.] Though the people were uneasy at it, and their discontent might have ended in a mutiny, yet the princes would not violate their engagement to the Gibeonites; we must never be over-awed, either by majesty or multitude, to do a sinful thing, and go against our consciences. [3.] Though they were drawn into this league by a wile, and might have had a very plausible pretence to declare it null and void, yet they adhered to it. They might have pleaded that though those were the men with whom they exchanged the ratifications, yet these were not the cities intended in the league; they had promised to spare certain cities, without names, that were very far off, and upon the express consideration of their being so; but these were very near, and therefore not the cities that they covenanted with. And many learned men have thought that they were so grossly imposed upon by the Gibeonites that it would have been lawful for them to have recalled their promise, but to preserve their reputation, and to keep up in Israel a veneration for an oath, they would

stand to it; but it is plain that they thought themselves indispensably obliged by it, and were apprehensive that the wrath of God would fall upon them if they broke it. And, however their adherence to it might be displeasing to the congregation, it is plain that it was acceptable to God; for when, in pursuance of this league, they undertook the protection of the Gibeonites, God gave them the most glorious victory that ever they had in all their wars (ch. x.), and long afterwards severely avenged the wrong Saul did to the Gibeonites in violation of this league, 2 Sam. xxi. 1. Let this convince us all how religiously we ought to perform our promises, and make good our bargains; and what conscience we ought to make of our words when they are once given. If a covenant obtained by so many lies and deceits might not be broken, shall we think to evade the obligation of those that have been made with all possible honesty and fairness? If the fraud of others will not justify or excuse our falsehood, certainly the honesty of others in dealing with us will aggravate and condemn our dishonesty in dealing with them.

2. Though they spared their lives, yet they seized their liberties, and sentenced them to be hewers of wood and drawers of water to the congregation, v. 21. By this proposal the discontented congregation was pacified; for, (1.) Those who were angry that the Gibeonites lived might be content when they saw them condemned to that which, in the general apprehension, is worse than death, perpetual servitude. (2.) Those who were angry that they were not spoiled might be content when their serving the congregation would be more to the public advantage than their best effects could be; and, in short, the Israelites would be no losers either in honour or profit by this peace with the Gibeonites; convince them of this, and they will be satisfied.

22 And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? 23 Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. 24 And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing. 25 And now, behold, we are in thine



nand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do. 26 And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. 27 And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

The matter is here settled between Joshua and the Gibeonites, and an explanation of the league agreed upon. We may suppose that now, not the messengers who were first sent, but the elders of Gibeon, and of the cities that were dependent upon it, were themselves present and treated with, that the matter might be fully compromised.

1. Joshua reproves them for their fraud, v. 22. And they excuse it as well as they can, v. 24. 1. Joshua gives the reproof very mildly: *Wherefore have you beguiled us?* He does not load them with any ill names, does not give them any harsh provoking language, does not call them, as they deserved to be called, *base liars*, but only asks them, *Why have you beguiled us?* Under the greatest provocations, it is our wisdom and duty to keep our temper, and to bridle our passion; a just cause needs not anger to defend it, and a bad one is made never the better by it. 2. They make the best excuse for themselves, that the thing would bear, v. 24. They found by the word of God that sentence of death was passed upon them (the command was to *destroy all the inhabitants of the land*, without exception), and they found by the works of God already wrought that there was no opposing the execution of this sentence; they considered that God's sovereignty is incontestable, his justice inflexible, his power irresistible, and therefore resolved to try what his mercy was, and found it was not in vain to cast themselves upon it. They do not go about to justify their lie, but in effect beg pardon for it, pleading it was purely to save their lives that they did it, which every man that finds in himself the force of the law of self-preservation will therefore make great allowances for, especially in such a case as this, where the fear was not merely of the power of man (if that were all, one might flee from that to the divine protection), but of the power of God himself, which they saw engaged against them.

11. Joshua condemns them to servitude, as a punishment of their fraud (v. 23), and they submit to the sentence (v. 25), and for aught that appears both sides are pleased.

1. Joshua pronounces them perpetual bondmen. They had purchased their lives with a lie, but, that being no good consideration, he obliges them to hold their lives

under the rent and reservation of their continual labours, in hewing wood and drawing water, the meanest and most toilsome employments. Thus their lie was punished; had they dealt fairly and plainly with Israel, perhaps they would have had more honourable conditions granted them, but now, since they gain their lives with ragged clothes and clouted shoes, the badges of servitude, they are condemned for ever to wear such, so must their doom be. And thus the ransom of their lives is paid; dominion is acquired by the preservation of a life that lies at mercy (*servus dicitur à servando—a servant is so called from the act of saving*); they owe their service to those to whom they owe their lives. Observe how the judgment is given against them. (1.) Their servitude is made a curse to them. "Now you are cursed with the ancient curse of Canaan," from whom these Hivites descended, *a servant of servants shalt thou be*, Gen. ix. 25. What shall be done to the false tongue but this? Cursed shall it be. (2.) Yet this curse is turned into a blessing; they must be servants, but it shall be for *the house of my God*. The princes would have them slaves unto all the congregation (v. 21), at least they chose to express themselves so, for the pacifying of the people that were discontented; but Joshua mitigates the sentence, both in honour to God and in favour to the Gibeonites: it would be too hard upon them to make them every man's drudge; if they must be *hewers of wood and drawers of water*, than which there cannot be a greater disparagement, especially to those who are citizens of a royal city, and *all mighty men* (ch. x. 2), yet they shall be so to *the house of my God*, than which there cannot be a greater preferment: David himself could have wished to be a door-keeper there. Even servile work becomes honourable when it is done for the house of our God and the offices thereof. [1.] They were hereby excluded from the liberties and privileges of true-born Israelites, and a remaining mark of distinction was put upon their posterity throughout all their generations. [2.] They were hereby employed in such services as required their personal attendance upon *the altar of God in the place which he should choose* (v. 27), which would bring them to the knowledge of the law of God, keep them strictly to that holy religion to which they were proselyted, and prevent their revolt to the idolatries of their fathers. [3.] This would be a great advantage to the priests and Levites to have so many, and those mighty men, constant attendants upon them, and engaged by office to do all the drudgery of the tabernacle. A great deal of wood must be hewed for fuel for God's house, not only to keep the fire burning continually upon the altar, but to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings, &c. And a great deal of water must be drawn for the divers wash-

ings which the law prescribed. These and other such servile works, such as washing the vessels, carrying out ashes, sweeping the courts, &c., which otherwise the Levites must have done themselves, these Gibeonites were appointed to do. [4.] They were herein servants to the congregation too; for whatever promotes and helps forward the worship of God is real service to the commonwealth. It is the interest of every Israelite that the altar of God be well attended. Hereby also the congregation was excused from much of that servile work which perhaps would otherwise have been expected from some of them. God had made a law that the Israelites should never make any of their brethren bondmen; if they had slaves, they must be of the heathen that were round about them, Lev. xxv. 44. Now in honour of this law, and of Israel that was honoured by it, God would not have the drudgery, no, not of the tabernacle itself, to be done by Israelites, but by Gibeonites, who were afterwards called *Nethinim*, men given to the Levites, as the Levites were to the priests (Nun. iii. 9), to minister to them in the service of God. [5.] This may be looked upon as typifying the admission of the Gentiles into the gospel church. Now they were taken in upon their submission to be under-officers, but afterwards God promises that he will *take of them for priests and Levites*, Isa. lxvi. 21.

2. They submit to this condition, v. 25. Conscious of a fault in framing a lie whereby to deceive the Israelites, and sensible also how narrowly they escaped with their lives and what a kindness it was to have them spared, they acquiesce in the proposal: *Do as it seemeth right unto thee*. Better live in servitude, especially such servitude, than not live at all. Those of the very meanest and most despicable condition are described to be *hewers of wood and drawers of water*, Deut. xxix. 11. But skin for skin, liberty, and labour, and *all that a man has, will he give for his life*, and no ill bargain. Accordingly the matter was determined. (1.) Joshua delivered them out of the hands of the Israelites that they should not be slain, v. 26. It seems there were those who would have fallen upon them with the sword if Joshua had not interposed with his authority; but wise generals know when to sheathe the sword, as well as when to draw it. (2.) He then delivered them again into the hands of the Israelites to be enslaved, v. 27. They were not to keep possession of their cities, for we find afterwards that three of them fell to the lot of Benjamin and one to that of Judah; nor were they themselves to be at their own disposal, but, as bishop Patrick thinks, were dispersed into the cities of the priests and Levites, and came up with them in their courses to serve at the altar, out of the profits of which, it is probable, they were maintained. And thus Israel's bondmen became the Lord's freemen, for his service in the

meanest office is liberty, and his work is its own wages. And thus they got by their early submission. Let us, in like manner, submit to our Lord Jesus, and refer our lives to him, saying, "*We are in thy hand, do unto us as seemeth good and right unto thee* : only save our souls, and we shall not repent it : " if he appoint us to bear his cross, and draw in his yoke, and serve at his altar, this shall be afterwards neither shame nor grief to us, while the meanest office in God's service will entitle us to a *dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of our life*.

## CHAP. X.

We have in this chapter an account of the conquest of the kings and kingdoms of the southern part of the land of Canaan, as, in the next chapter, of the reduction of the northern parts, which together completed the glorious successes of the wars of Canaan. In this chapter we have an account, 1. Of the routing of their forces in the field, in which observe, 1. Their confederacy against the Gibeonites, ver. 1-5. 2. The Gibeonites' request to Joshua to assist them, ver. 6. 3. Joshua's speedy march under divine encouragement for their relief, ver. 7-9. 4. The defeat of the armies of these confederate kings, ver. 10, 11. 5. The miraculous prolonging of the day by the standing still of the sun in favour of the conquerors, ver. 12-14. 11. Of the execution of the kings that escaped out of the battle, ver. 15-27. 111. Of the taking of the particular cities, and the total destruction of all that were found in them. Makkedah, ver. 28. Libnah, ver. 29, 30. Lachish, ver. 31, 32, and the king of Gezer that attempted its rescue, ver. 33. Eglon, ver. 34, 35. Hebron, ver. 36, 37. Debir, ver. 38, 39. And the bringing of all that country into the hands of Israel, ver. 40-42. And, lastly, the return of the army to their head-quarters, ver. 43.

**N**OW it came to pass, when Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; 2 That they feared greatly, because Gibeon *was* a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it *was* greater than Ai, and all the men thereof *were* mighty. 3 Wherefore Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem sent unto Hoham king of Hebron, and unto Piram king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia king of Lachish, and unto Debir king of Eglon, saying, 4 Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel. 5 Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it. 6 And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants;

come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us.

Joshua and the hosts of Israel had now been a good while in the land of Canaan, and no great matters were effected; they were made masters of Jericho by a miracle, of Ai by stratagem, and of Gibeon by surrender, and that was all; hitherto the progress of their victories had not seemed proportionable to the magnificence of their entry and the glory of their beginnings. Those among them that were impatient of delays, it is probable, complained of Joshua's slowness, and asked why they did not immediately penetrate into the heart of the country, before the enemy could rally their forces to make head against them, why they stood trifling, while they were so confident both of their title and of their success. Thus Joshua's prudence, perhaps, was censured as slothfulness, cowardice, and want of spirit. But, 1. Canaan was not to be conquered in a day. God had said that *by little and little* he would drive out the Canaanites, Exod. xxiii. 30. He that believeth will not make haste, or conclude that the promise will never be performed because it is not performed so soon as he expected. 2. Joshua waited for the Canaanites to be the aggressors; let them first make an onset upon Israel, or the allies of Israel, and then their destruction will be, or at least will appear to be, the more just and the more justifiable. Joshua had warrant sufficient to set upon them, yet he stays till they strike the first stroke, that he might provide for honest things in the sight, not only of God, but of men; and they would be the more inexcusable in their resistance, now that they had seen what favour the Gibeonites found with Israel. 3. It was for the advantage of Israel to sit still awhile, that the forces of these little kings might unite in one body, and so might the more easily be cut off at one blow. This God had in his eye when he put it into their hearts to combine against Israel; though they designed thereby to strengthen one another, that which he intended was to gather them as sheaves into the floor, to fall together under the flail, Mic. iv. 12. Thus oftentimes that seeming paradox proves wholesome counsel, *Stay awhile, and we shall have done the sooner.*

After Israel had waited awhile for an occasion to make war upon the Canaanites, a fair one offers itself. 1. Five kings combine against the Gibeonites. Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem was the first mover and ring-leader of this confederacy. He had a good name (it signifies *lord of righteousness*), being a descendant perhaps from Melchizedek, *king of righteousness*; but, notwithstanding the goodness of his name and family, it seems he was a bad man, and an implacable enemy to the posterity of that Abraham to whom

his predecessor, Melchizedek, was such a faithful friend. He called upon his neighbours to join against Israel either because he was the most honourable prince, and had the precedency among these kings (perhaps they had some dependence upon him, at least they paid a deference to him, as the most public, powerful, and active man they had among them), or because he was first or most apprehensive of the danger his country was in, not only by the conquest of Jericho and Ai, but the surrender of Gibeon, which, it seems, was the chief thing that alarmed him, it being one of the most considerable frontier towns they had. Against Gibeon therefore all the force he could raise must be levelled. *Come, says he, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon.* This he resolves to do, either, (1.) In policy, that he might retake the city, because it was a strong city, and of great consequence to his country in whose hands it was; or, (2.) In passion, that he might chastise the citizens for making peace with Joshua, pretending that they had perfidiously betrayed their country and strengthened the common enemy, whereas they had really done the greatest kindness imaginable to their country, by setting them a good example, if they would have followed it. Thus Satan and his instruments make war upon those that make peace with God. *Marvel not if the world hate you,* and treat those as deserters who are converts to Christ. 2. The Gibeonites send notice to Joshua of the distress and danger they are in, r. 6. Now they expect benefit from the league they had made with Israel, because, though it was obtained by deceit, it was afterwards confirmed when the truth came out. They think Joshua obliged to help them, (1.) In conscience, because they were his servants; not in compliment, as they had said in their first address (ch. ix. 8), *We are thy servants*, but in reality made servants to the congregation; and it is the duty of masters to take care of the poorest and meanest of their servants, and not to see them wronged when it is in the power of their hand to right them. Those that pay allegiance may reasonably expect protection. Thus David pleads with God (Ps. cxix. 94), *I am thine, save me*; and so may we, if indeed we be his. (2.) In honour, because the ground of their enemies' quarrel with them was the respect they had shown to Israel, and the confidence they had in a covenant with them. Joshua cannot refuse to help them when it is for their affection to him, and to the name of his God, that they are attacked. David thinks it a good plea with God (Ps. lxxix. 7), *For thy sake I have borne reproach.* When our spiritual enemies set themselves in array against us, and threaten to swallow us up, let us, by faith and prayer, apply to Christ, our Joshua, for strength and succour, as Paul did, and we shall receive the same answer of peace, *My grace is sufficient for thee*, 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

7 So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. 8 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. 9 Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. 10 And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. 11 And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: *they were* more which died with hailstones than *they* whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. 12 Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. 13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. *Is not this written in the book of Jasher?* So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. 14 And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.

Here, I. Joshua resolves to assist the Gibeonites, and God encourages him in this resolve. 1. He ascended from Gilgal (v. 7), that is, he designed, determined, and prepared for, this expedition to relieve Gibeon, for it is probable it was before he stirred a step that God spoke to him to encourage him. It was generous and just in Joshua to help his new allies, though perhaps the king of Jerusalem, when he attacked them, little thought that Joshua would be so ready to help them, but expected he would abandon them as Canaanites, the rather because they had obtained their league with him by fraud; therefore he speaks with as-

surance (v. 4) of smiting Gibeon. But Joshua knew that his promise to let them live obliged him, not only not to slay them himself, but not to stand by and see them slain when it was in the power of his hand to prevent it, Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. He knew that when they embraced the faith and worship of the God of Israel they came to trust under the shadow of his wings (Ruth ii. 12), and therefore, as his servants, he was bound to protect them. 2. God animated him for his undertaking, (v. 8): *Fear not*, that is, (1.) "Doubt not of the goodness of thy cause and the clearness of thy call; though it be to assist Gibeonites, thou art in the way of duty, and God is with thee of a truth." (2.) "Dread not the power of the enemy; though so many kings are confederate against thee, and are resolved to make their utmost efforts for the reduction of Gibeon, and it may be will fight desperately in a desperate cause, yet let not this discourage thee, *I have delivered them into thy hand*;" and those can make neither resistance nor escape whom God has marked for destruction.

II. Joshua applies himself to execute this resolve, and God assists him in the execution. Here we have,

1. The great industry of Joshua, and the power of God working with it for the defeat of the enemy. In this action, (1.) Joshua showed his good-will in the haste he made for the relief of Gibeon (v. 9): *He came unto them suddenly*, for the extremity was such as would not admit delay. If one of the tribes of Israel had been in danger, he could not have shown more care or zeal for its relief than here for Gibeon, remembering in this, as in other cases, there must be one law for the stranger that was proselyted and for him that was born in the land. Scarcely had the confederate princes got their forces together, and sat down before Gibeon, when Joshua was upon them, the surprise of which would put them into the greatest confusion. Now that the enemy were actually drawn up into a body, which had all as it were but one neck, despatch was as serviceable to his cause as before delay was, while he waited for this general rendezvous; and now that things were ripe for execution no man more expeditious than Joshua, who before had seemed slow. Now it shall never be said, *He left that to be done to-morrow which he could do to-day*. When Joshua found he could not reach Gibeon in a day, lest he should lose any real advantages against the enemy, or so much as seem to come short or to neglect his new allies, he marched all night, resolving not to give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eye-lids, till he had accomplished this enterprise. It was well the forces he took with him were mighty men of valour, not only able-bodied men, but men of spirit and resolution, and hearty in the cause, else they neither could nor would have borne this fatigue, but would have murmured at their

leader, and would have asked, "Is this the rest we were promised in Canaan?" But they well considered that the present toil was in order to a happy settlement, and therefore were reconciled to it. Let the *good soldiers of Jesus Christ* learn hence to *endure hardness, in following the Lamb whithersoever he goes*, and not think themselves undone if their religion lose them now and then a night's sleep; it will be enough to rest when we come to heaven. But why needed Joshua to put himself and his men so much to the stretch? Had not God promised him that without fail he would *deliver the enemies into his hand*? It is true he had; but God's promises are intended, not to slacken and supersede, but to quicken and encourage our endeavours. He that believeth doth not make haste to anticipate providence, but doth make haste to attend it, with a diligent, not a distrustful, speed. (2.) God showed his great power in defeating the enemies whom Joshua so vigorously attacked, v. 10, 11. Joshua had a very numerous and powerful army with him, hands enough to despatch a dispirited enemy, so that the enemy might have been scattered by the ordinary fate of war; but God himself would appear in this great and decisive battle, and draw up the artillery of heaven against the Canaanites, to demonstrate to his people that they *got not this land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but God's right hand and his arm*, Ps. xlv. 3. *The Lord discomfited them before Israel*. Israel did what they could, and yet God did all. [1.] It must needs be a very great terror and confusion to the enemy to perceive that heaven itself fought against them; for who can contest with, flee from, or fence against, the powers of heaven? They had affronted the true God and robbed him of his honour by worshipping the host of heaven, giving that worship to the creature which is due to the Creator only; and now the host of heaven fights against them, and even that part of the creation which they had idolized is at war with them, and even triumphs in their ruin, Jer. viii. 2. There is no way of making any creature propitious to us, no, not by sacrifice nor offering, but only by making our peace with God and keeping ourselves in his love. This had been enough to make them an easy prey to the victorious Israelites, yet this was not all. [2.] Besides the terror struck upon them, there was a great slaughter made of them by hail-stones, which were so large, and came down with such a force, that more were killed by the hail-stones than by the sword of the Israelites, though no doubt they were busy. God himself speaks to Job of treasures, or magazines, of snow and hail, which he has reserved for the day of battle and war (Job xxxviii. 22, 23), and here they are made use of to destroy the Canaanites. Here was hail, shot from God's great ordnance, that, against whomsoever it was directed, was sure to hit

(and never glanced upon the Israelites mixed with them), and wherever it hit was sure to kill. See here how miserable those are that have God for their enemy, and how sure to perish; it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands, for there is no fleeing out of them. Some observe that Beth-horon lay north of Gibeon, Azekah and Makkedah lay south, so that they fled each way; but, which way soever they fled, the hail-stones pursued them, and met them at every turn.

2. The great faith of Joshua, and the power of God crowning it with the miraculous arrest of the sun, that the day of Israel's victories might be prolonged, and so the enemy totally defeated. The hail-stones had their rise no higher than the clouds, but, to show that Israel's help came from above the clouds, the sun itself, who by his constant motion serves the whole earth, by halting when there was occasion served the Israelites, and did them a kindness. *The sun and moon stood still in their habitation, at the light of thy arrows* which gave the signal, Hab. iii. 11.

(1.) Here is the prayer of Joshua that the sun might stand still. I call it his prayer, because it is said (v. 12) *he spoke to the Lord*; as Elijah, though we read (1 Kings xvii. 1) only of his prophesying of the drought, yet is said (James v. 17) to pray for it. Observe, [1.] An instance of Joshua's unwearied activity in the service of God and Israel, that though he had marched all night and fought all day, and, one might expect, would be inclined to repose himself and get a little sleep, and give his army some time to rest—that, like the hireling, he would earnestly desire the shadow, and bid the night welcome, when he had done such a good day's work—yet, instead of this, he wishes for nothing so much as the prolonging of the day. Note, Those that *wait on the Lord* and work for him *shall renew their strength, shall run and not be weary, shall walk and not faint*, Isa. xl. 31. [2.] An instance of his great faith in the almighty power of God, as above the power of nature, and able to control and alter the usual course of it. No doubt Joshua had an extraordinary impulse or impression upon his spirit, which he knew to be of divine origin, prompting him to desire that this miracle might be wrought upon this occasion, else it would have been presumption in him to desire or expect it; the prayer would not have been granted by the divine power, if it had not been dictated by the divine grace. God wrought this faith in him, and then said, "*According to thy faith, and thy prayer of faith, be it unto thee.*" It cannot be imagined, however, that such a thing as this should have entered into his mind if God had not put it there; a man would have had a thousand projects in his head for the completing of the victory before he would have thought of desiring the sun to stand still; but even in the Old-Testament saints the Spirit made

*intercession according to the will of God* What God will give he inclines the hearts of his praying people to ask, and for what he will do he will be enquired of, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Now, *First*, It looked great for Joshua to say, *Sun, stand thou still*. His ancestor Joseph had indeed dreamed that the sun and moon did homage to him; but who would have thought that, after it had been fulfilled in the figure, it should be again fulfilled in the letter to one of his posterity? The prayer is thus expressed with authority, because it was not an ordinary prayer, such as is directed and supported only by God's common providence or promise, but the prayer of a prophet at this time divinely inspired for this purpose; and yet it intimates to us the prevalency of prayer in general, so far as it is regulated by the word of God, and may remind us of that honour put upon prayer (Isa. xlv. 11), *Concerning the work of my hands command you me*. He bids the sun stand still upon Gibeon, the place of action and the seat of war, intimating that what he designed in this request was the advantage of Israel against their enemies; it is probable that the sun was now declining, and that he did not call for the lengthening out of the day until he observed it hastening towards its period. He does likewise, in the name of the King of kings, arrest the moon, perhaps because it was requisite for the preserving of the harmony and good order of the spheres that the course of the rest of the heavenly bodies should be stayed likewise, otherwise, while the sun shone, he needed not the moon; and here he mentions the valley of Ajalon, which was near to Gibeon, because there he was at that time. *Secondly*, It was bold indeed to say so before Israel, and argues a very strong assurance of faith. If the event had not answered the demand, nothing could have been a greater slur upon him; the Israelites would have concluded he was certainly going mad, or he would never have talked so extravagantly. But he knew very well God would own and answer a petition which he himself directed to be drawn up and presented, and therefore was not afraid to say before all Israel, calling them to observe this work of wonder, *Sun, stand thou still*, for he was confident in him whom he had trusted. He believed the almighty power of God, else he could not have expected that the sun, going on in its strength, driving in a full career, and *rejoicing as a strong man to run a race*, should be stopped in an instant. He believed the sovereignty of God in the kingdom of nature, else he could not have expected that the established law and course of nature should be changed and interrupted, the ordinances of heaven, and the constant usage according to these ordinances, broken in upon. And he believed God's particular favour to Israel above all people under the sun, else he could not have expected that, to favour them upon

an emergency with a double day, he should (which must follow of course) amaze and terrify so great a part of the terrestrial globe with a double night at the same time. It is true, he *causeth the sun to shine upon the just and the unjust*; but for this once the unjust shall wait for it beyond the usual time, while, in favour to righteous Israel, it stands still.

(2.) The wonderful answer to this prayer. No sooner said than done (c. 13): *The sun stood still, and the moon staid*. Notwithstanding the vast distance between the earth and the sun, at the word of Joshua the sun stopped immediately; for the same God that rules in heaven above rules at the same time on this earth, and, when he pleases, even *the heavens shall hear the earth*, as here. Concerning this great miracle it is here said, [1.] *That it continued a whole day*, that is, the sun continued as long again above the horizon as otherwise it would have done. It is commonly supposed to have been about the middle of summer that this happened, when, in that country, it was about fourteen hours between sun and sun, so that this day was about twenty-eight hours long; yet, if we suppose it to have been at that time of the year when the days are at the shortest, it will be the more probable that Joshua should desire and pray for the prolonging of the day. [2.] That hereby the people had full time to avenge themselves of their enemies, and to give them a total defeat. We often read in history of battles which the night put an end to, the shadows of which favoured the retreat of the conquered; to prevent this advantage to the enemy in their flight, the day was doubled, that the hand of Israel might *find out all their enemies*; but the eye and hand of God can find them out without the help of the sun's light, for to him *the night shineth as the day*, Ps. cxxxix. 12. Note, Sometimes God completes a great salvation in a little time, and makes but one day's work of it. Perhaps this miracle is alluded to Zech. xiv. 6, 7, where the day of God's fighting against the nations is said to be *one day*, and that *at evening time it shall be light*, as here. And, [3.] That there was *never any day like it*, before or since, in which God put such an honour upon faith and prayer, and upon Israel's cause; never did he so wonderfully comply with the request of a man, nor so wonderfully fight for his people. [4.] This is said to be written *in the book of Jasher*, a collection of state-poems, in which the poem made upon this occasion was preserved among the rest; probably the same with that *book of the wars of the Lord* (Num. xxi. 14), which afterwards was continued and carried on by one Jasher. Those words, *Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon*, sounding metrical, are supposed to be taken from the narrative of this event as it was found in the book of Jasher. Not that the divine testimony of

the book of Joshua needed confirmation from the book of Jasher, a human composition; but to those who had that book in their hands it would be of use to compare this history with it, which warrants the appeals the learned make to profane history for corroborating the proofs of the truth of sacred history. [5.] But surely this stupendous miracle of the standing still of the sun was intended for something more than merely to give Israel so much the more time to find out and kill their enemies, which, without this, might have been done the next day. *First*, God would hereby magnify Joshua (*ch. iii. 7.*), as a particular favourite, and one whom he did delight to honour, being a type of him who has all power both in heaven and in earth and whom the winds and the seas obey. *Secondly*, He would hereby notify to all the world what he was doing for his people Israel here in Canaan; the sun, the eye of the world, must be fixed for some hours upon Gibeon and the valley of Ajalon, as if to contemplate the great works of God there for Israel, and so to engage the children of men to look that way, and to *enquire of this wonder done in the land*, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Proclamation was hereby made to all the neighbouring nations. *Come, behold the works of the Lord* (Ps. xli. 8), and say, *What nation is there so great as Israel is, who has God so nigh unto them?* One would have supposed that this would bring such real ambassadors as the Gibeonites pretended to be from a very far country, to court the friendship of Israel because of the name of the Lord their God. *Thirdly*, He would hereby convince and confound those idolaters that worshipped the sun and moon and gave divine honours to them, by demonstrating that they were subject to the command of the God of Israel, and that, as high as they were, he was above them; and thus he would fortify his people against temptations to this idolatry, which he foresaw they would be addicted to (*Dent. iv. 19.*), and which, notwithstanding this, they afterwards corrupted themselves with. *Fourthly*, This miracle signified (it is the learned bishop Pierson's notion) that in the latter days, when the light of the world was tending towards a night of darkness, the *Sun of righteousness*, even our Joshua, should arise (*Mal. iv. 2.*), give check to the approaching night, and be the true light. To which let me add that when Christ conquered our spiritual enemies upon the cross the miracle wrought on the sun was the reverse of this; it was then darkened as if it had gone down at noon, for Christ needed not the light of the sun to carry on his victories: he then made darkness his pavilion. And, *Lastly*, The arresting of the sun and moon in this day of battle prefigured the turning of the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood, in the last great and terrible day of the Lord.

15 And Joshua returned, and all

Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal. 16 But these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah. 17 And it was told Joshua, saying, The five kings are found hid in a cave at Makkedah. 18 And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them: 19 And stay ye not, *but* pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand. 20 And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest *which* remained of them entered into fenced cities. 21 And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace: none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel. 22 Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave. 23 And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. 24 And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them. 25 And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight. 26 And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. 27 And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, *that* Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great

stones in the cave's mouth, *which remain* until this very day.

It was a brave appearance, no doubt, which the five kings made when they took the field for the reducing of Gibeon, and a brave army they had following them; but they were all routed, put into disorder first, and then brought to destruction by the hail-stones. And now Joshua thought, his work being done, he might go with his army into quarters of refreshment. Accordingly it was resolved, perhaps in a council of war, that they should presently return to the camp at Gilgal (v. 15), till they should receive orders from God to take possession of the country they had now conquered; but he soon finds he has more work cut out for him. The victory must be pursued, that the spoils might be divided. Accordingly he applies himself to it with renewed vigour.

I. The forces that had dispersed themselves must be followed and smitten. When tidings were brought to Joshua where the kings were he ordered a guard to be set upon them for the present (v. 18), reserving them for another day of destruction, and to be brought forth to a day of wrath, Job xxi. 30. He directs his men to pursue the common soldiers, as much as might be, to prevent their escaping to the garrisons, which would strengthen them, and make the reduction of them the more difficult, v. 19. Like a prudent general, he does that first which is most needful, and defers his triumphs till he has completed his conquests; nor was he in such haste to insult over the captive kings but that he would first prevent the rallying again of their scattered forces. The result of this vigorous pursuit was, 1. That a very great slaughter was made of the enemies of God and Israel. And, 2. The field was cleared of them, so that none remained but such as got into fenced cities, where they would not long be safe themselves, nor were they capable of doing any service to the cities that sheltered them, unless they could have left their fears behind them. 3. None moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel, v. 21. This expression intimates, (1.) Their perfect safety and tranquillity; some think it should be read (from Exod. xi. 7), *Against any of the children of Israel did not a dog move his tongue*; no, not against any one man of them. They were not threatened by any danger at all after their victory, no, not so much as the barking of a dog. Not one single Israelite (for the original makes it so particular) was brought into any distress, either in the battle or in the pursuit. (2.) Their honour and reputation; no man had any reproach to cast upon them, nor an ill word to give them. God not only tied the hands, but stopped the mouths, of their enraged enemies, and put lying lips to silence. (3.) The Chaldee paraphrase makes it an expression of their unalloyed joy for this vic-

tory, reading it, *There was no hurt nor loss to the children of Israel, for which any man should afflict his soul*. When the army came to be reviewed after the battle, there was none slain, none wounded, none missing. Not one Israelite had occasion to lament either the loss of a friend or the loss of a limb, so cheap, so easy, so glorious, was this victory.

II. The kings that had hidden themselves must now be called to an account, as rebels against the Israel of God, to whom, by the divine promise and grant, this land did of right belong and should have been surrendered upon demand. See here,

1. How they were secured. The cave which they fled to, and trusted in for a refuge, became their prison, in which they were clapped up, till Joshua sat in judgment on them, v. 18. It seems they all escaped both the hail-stones and the sword, God so ordering it, not in kindness to them, but that they might be reserved for a more solemn and terrible execution; as, for this cause, Pharaoh survived the plagues of Egypt, and was made to stand, that God might in him show his power, Exod. ix. 16. They all fled, and met at the same place, Providence directing them; and now those who were lately consulting against Israel were put upon new counsels to preserve themselves, and agreed to take shelter in the same cave. The information brought to Joshua of this is an evidence that there were those of the country, who knew the holes and fastnesses of it, that were in his interests. And the care Joshua took to keep them there when they were there, as it is an instance of his policy and presence of mind, even in the heat of action, so, in the result of their project, it shows how those not only deceive themselves, but destroy themselves, who think to hide themselves from God. Their refuge of lies will but bind them over to God's judgment.

2. How they were triumphed over. Joshua ordered them to be brought forth out of the cave, set before him as at the bar, and their names called over, v. 22, 23. And when they either were bound and cast upon the ground, unable to help themselves, or threw themselves upon the ground, humbly to beg for their lives, he called for the general officers and great men, and commanded them to trample upon these kings, and set their feet upon their necks, not in sport and to make themselves and the company merry, but with the gravity and decorum that became the ministers of the divine justice, who were not herein to gratify any pride or passion of their own, but to give glory to the God of Israel as higher than the highest, who *treads upon princes as mortar* (Isa. xli. 25), and is *terrible to the kings of the earth*, Ps. lxxvi. 12. The thing does indeed look barbarous, thus to insult over men in misery, who had suddenly fallen from the highest pitch of honour into this disgrace. It was hard for crowned heads to be thus trodden upon, not by Joshua



himself (that might better have been borne), at least not by him only, but by all the captains of the army. Certainly it ought not to be drawn into a precedent, for the case was extraordinary, and we have reason to think it was by divine direction and impulse that Joshua did this. (1.) God would hereby punish the abominable wickedness of these kings, the measure of whose iniquity was now full. And, by this public act of justice done upon these ringleaders of the Canaanites in sin, he would possess his people with the greater dread and detestation of those sins of the nations that God cast out from before them, which they would be tempted to imitate. (2.) He would hereby have the promise by Moses made good (Deut. xxxiii. 29), *Thou shalt tread upon their high places*, that is, their great men, which should the rather be speedily fulfilled in the letter because they are the very last words of Moses that we find upon record. (3.) He would hereby encourage the faith and hope of his people Israel in reference to the wars that were yet before them. Therefore Joshua said (v. 25). *Fear not, nor be dismayed.* [1.] "Fear not these kings, nor any of theirs, as if there were any danger of having this affront now put upon them in after-time revenged upon yourselves, a consideration which keeps many from being insolent towards those they have at their mercy, because they know not how soon the uncertain fate of war may turn the same wheel upon themselves; but you need not fear that any should rise up ever to revenge this quarrel." [2.] "Fear not any other kings, who may at any time be in confederacy against you, for you see these brought down, whom you thought formidable. Thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies; now that they begin to fall, to fall so low that you may set your feet on their necks, you may be confident that they shall not prevail, but shall surely fall before you," Esth. vi. 13. (4.) He would hereby give a type and figure of Christ's victories over the powers of darkness, and believers' victories through him. All the enemies of the Redeemer shall be made his footstool, Ps. cx. 1. And see Ps. xviii. 40. *The kings of the earth set themselves against him* (Ps. ii. 2), but sooner or later we shall see all things put under him (Heb. ii. 8), and *principalities and powers* made a show of, Col. ii. 15. And in these triumphs we are more than conquerors, may tread upon the lion and adder (Ps. xci. 13), may ride on the high places of the earth (Isa. lviii. 14), and may be confident that *the God of peace shall tread Satan under our feet*, shall do it shortly and do it effectually, Rom. xvi. 20. See Ps. cxlix. 8, 9.

3. How they were put to death. Perhaps, when they had undergone that terrible mortification of being trodden upon by the captains of Israel, they were ready to say, as Agag, *Surely the bitterness of death is past, and that sufficient unto them was this punish-*

*ment which was inflicted by many; but their honours cannot excuse their lives, their forfeited devoted lives.* Joshua smote them with the sword, and then hanged up their bodies till evening, when they were taken down, and thrown into the cave in which they had hidden themselves, v. 26, 27. That which they thought would have been their shelter was made their prison first and then their grave; so shall we be disappointed in that which we flee to from God: yet to good people the grave is still a *hiding-place*, Job xiv. 13. If these five kings had humbled themselves in time, and had begged peace instead of waging war, they might have saved their lives; but now the decree had gone forth, and they found no place for repentance, or the reversal of the judgment; it was too late to expect it, though perhaps they sought it carefully with tears.

28 And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed, them, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain: and he did to the king of Makkedah as he did unto the king of Jericho. 29 Then Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, unto Libnah, and fought against Libnah: 30 And the Lord delivered it also, and the king thereof, into the hand of Israel; and he smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain in it; but did unto the king thereof as he did unto the king of Jericho. 31 And Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, unto Lachish, and encamped against it, and fought against it: 32 And the Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein, according to all that he had done to Libnah. 33 Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua smote him and his people, until he had left him none remaining. 34 And from Lachish Joshua passed unto Eglon, and all Israel with him; and they encamped against it, and fought against it: 35 And they took it on that day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein he utterly destroyed that day, accord-

ing to all that he had done to Lachish. 36 And Joshua went up from Eglon, and all Israel with him, unto Hebron; and they fought against it: 37 And they took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof, and all the souls that *were* therein; he left none remaining, according to all that he had done to Eglon; but destroyed it utterly, and all the souls that *were* therein. 38 And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to Debir; and fought against it: 39 And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that *were* therein; he left none remaining: as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king. 40 So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. 41 And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon. 42 And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. 43 And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal.

We are here informed how Joshua improved the late glorious victory he had obtained and the advantages he had gained by it, and to do this well is a general's praise.

1. Here is a particular account of the several cities which he immediately made himself master of. 1. The cities of three of the kings whom he had conquered in the field he went and took possession of, Lachish (v. 31, 32), Eglon (v. 34, 35), and Hebron, v. 36, 37. The other two, Jerusalem and Jarmuth, were not taken at this time; perhaps his forces were either so much fatigued with what they had done or so well content with what they had got that they had no mind to attack those places, and so they let slip the fairest opportunity they could ever expect of reducing them with ease, which afterwards was not done without difficulty, Judg. i. 8; 2 Sam. v. 6. 2. Three other cities, and

royal cities too, he took: Makedah, into the neighbourhood of which the five kings had fled, which brought Joshua and his forces thither in pursuit of them, and so hastened its ruin (v. 28), Libnah (v. 29, 30), and Debir, v. 38, 39. 3. One king that brought in his forces for the relief of Lachish, that had lost its king, proved to meddle to his own hurt; it was Horam king of Gezer, who, either in friendship to his neighbours or for his own security, offered to stop the progress of Joshua's arms, and was cut off with all his forces, v. 33. Thus wicked men are often snared in their counsels, and, by opposing God in the way of his judgments, bring them the sooner on their own heads.

II. A general account of the country which was hereby reduced and brought into Israel's hands (v. 40—42), that part of the land of Canaan of which they first got possession, which lay south of Jerusalem, and afterwards fell, for the most part, to the lot of the tribe of Judah. Observe in this narrative,

1. The great speed Joshua made in taking these cities, which, some think, is intimated in the manner of relating it, which is quick and concise. He flew like lightning from place to place; and though they all stood it out to the last extremity, and none of these cities opened their gates to him, yet in a little time he got them all into his hands, summoned them, and seized them, the same day (v. 28), or in two days, v. 32. Now that they were struck with fear, by the defeat of their armies and the death of their kings, Joshua prudently followed his blow. See what a great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we will but be busy and improve our opportunities.

2. The great severity Joshua used towards those he conquered. He gave no quarter to man, woman, nor child, put to the sword *all the souls* (v. 28, 30, 32, 35, &c.), *utterly destroyed all that breathed* (v. 40), and *left none remaining*. Nothing could justify this military execution but that herein they did as the *Lord God of Israel commanded* (v. 40), which was sufficient not only to bear them out, and save them from the imputation of cruelty, but to sanctify what they did, and make it an acceptable piece of service to his justice. God would hereby, (1.) Manifest his hatred of the idolatries and other abominations which the Canaanites had been guilty of, and leave us to judge how great the provocation was which they had given him by the greatness of the destruction which was brought upon them when the measure of their iniquity was full. (2.) He would hereby magnify his love to his people Israel, in giving so many men for them, and *people for their life*, Isa. xliii. 4. When the *heathen are to be cast out to make room for this vine* (Ps. lxxx. 8) divine justice appears more prodigal than ever of human blood, that the Israelites might find themselves for ever obliged to spend their lives to the glory of that God who had sacrificed so

many of the lives of his creatures to their interest. (3.) Hereby was typified the final and eternal destruction of all the impenitent implacable enemies of the Lord Jesus, who, having slighted the riches of his grace, must for ever feel the weight of his wrath, and shall have judgment without mercy. *Nations that forget God shall be turned into hell, and no reproach at all to God's infinite goodness.*

3. The great success of this expedition. The spoil of these cities was now divided among the men of war that plundered them; and the cities themselves, with the land about them, were shortly to be divided among the tribes, for the Lord fought for Israel, *v. 42*. They could not have gotten the victory if God had not undertaken the battle; then we conquer when God fights for us; and, *if he be for us, who can be against us?*

## CHAP. XI.

This chapter continues and concludes the history of the conquest of Canaan; of the reduction of the southern parts we had an account in the foregoing chapter, after which we may suppose Joshua allowed his forces some breathing-time; now here we have the story of the war in the north, and the happy success of that war. I. The confederacy of the northern crowns against Israel, *ver. 1-5*. II. The encouragement which God gave to Joshua to engage them, *ver. 6*. III. His victory over them, *ver. 7-9*. IV. The taking of their cities, *ver. 10-15*. V. The destruction of the Anakim, *ver. 21, 22*. VI. The general conclusion of the story of this war, *ver. 16-20, 23*.

AND it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, 2 And to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, 3 And to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. 4 And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. 5 And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. 6 And the Lord said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. 7 So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon

them. 8 And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. 9 And Joshua did unto them as the Lord bad him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

We are here entering upon the story of another campaign that Joshua made, and it was a glorious one, no less illustrious than the former in the success of it, though in respect of miracles it was inferior to it in glory. The wonders God then wrought for them were to animate and encourage them to act vigorously themselves. Thus the war carried on by the preaching of the gospel against Satan's kingdom was at first forwarded by miracles; but, the war being by them sufficiently proved to be of God, the managers of it are now left to the ordinary assistance of divine grace in the use of the sword of the Spirit, and must not expect hail-stones nor the standing still of the sun. In this story we have,

1. The Canaanites taking the field against Israel. They were the aggressors, God hardening their hearts to begin the war, that Israel might be justified beyond exception in destroying them. Joshua and all Israel had returned to the camp at Gilgal, and perhaps these kings knew no other than that they intended to sit down content with the conquest they had already made, and yet they prepare war against them. Note, Sinners bring ruin upon their own heads, so that God will be justified when he speaks, and they alone shall bear the blame for ever. Judah had now couched as a lion gone up from the prey; if the northern kings rouse him up, it is at their peril, Gen. xlix. 9. Now, 1. Several nations joined in this confederacy, some in the mountains and some in the plains, *v. 2*. Canaanites from east and west, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, &c. (*v. 3*), of different constitutions and divided interests among themselves, and yet they here unite against Israel as against a common enemy. Thus are the children of this world more unanimous, and therein wiser, than the children of light. The oneness of the church's enemies should shame the church's friends out of their discords and divisions, and engage them to be one. 2. The head of this confederacy was Jabin king of Hazor (*v. 1*), as Adoni-zedec was of the former; it is said (*v. 10*) Hazor had been the head of all those kingdoms, which could not have revolted without occasioning ill-will; but this was forgotten and laid aside upon this occasion, by consent of parties, Luke xxiii. 12. When they had all

drawn up their forces together, every kingdom bringing in its quota, they were a very great army, much greater than the former, *as the sand on the sea-shore in multitude*, and upon this account much stronger and more formidable, that they had horses and chariots very many, which we do not find the southern kings had; hereby they had a great advantage against Israel, for their army consisted only of foot, and they never brought horses nor chariots into the field. Josephus tells us that the army of the Canaanites consisted of 300,000 foot, 10,000 horse, and 20,000 chariots. *Many there be that rise up against God's Israel*; doubtless their numbers made them very confident of success, but it proved that so much the greater slaughter was made of them.

II. The encouragement God gave to Joshua to give them the meeting, even upon the ground of their own choosing (v. 6): *Be not afraid because of them*. Joshua was remarkable for his courage—it was his master grace, and yet it seems he had need to be again and again cautioned not to be afraid. Fresh dangers and difficulties make it necessary to fetch in fresh supports and comforts from the word of God, which we have always nigh unto us, to be made use of in every time of need. Those that have God on their side need not be disturbed at the number and power of their enemies; *more are those that are with us than those that are against us*; those have the hosts of the Lord that have the Lord of hosts engaged for them. For his encouragement, 1. God assures him of success, and fixes the hour: *To-morrow about this time*, when an engagement (it is probable) was expected and designed on both sides, *I will deliver them up slain*. Though they were to be slain by the sword of Israel, yet it is spoken of as God's work, that he would deliver them up. 2. He appoints him to *hough their horses, hamstring them, lame them, and burn their chariots*, not only that Israel might not use them hereafter, but that they might not fear them now, their God designing this contempt to be put upon them. Let Israel look upon their chariots but as rotten wood designed for the fire, and their horses of war as disabled things, scarcely good enough for the cart. This encouragement which God here gave to Joshua no doubt he communicated to the people, who perhaps were under some apprehensions of danger from this vast army, notwithstanding the experience they had had of God's power engaged for them. And the wisdom and goodness of God are to be observed, (1.) In infatuating the counsels of the enemy, that all the kings of Canaan, who were not dispersed at such a distance from each other but that they might have got all together in a body, did not at first confederate against Israel, but were divided into the southern and northern combination, and so became the less formidable. And, (2.) In preparing his people to encounter the greater

force, by breaking the less. They first engage with five kings together, and now with many more. God proportions our trials to our strength and our strength to our trials.

III. Joshua's march against these confederate forces, v. 7. *He came upon them suddenly*, and surprised them in their quarters. He made this haste, 1. That he might put them into the greater confusion, by giving them an alarm, when they little thought he was near them. 2. That he might be sure not to come short of the honour God had fixed, to give him the meeting at the enemies' camp, *to-morrow about this time*. It is fit we should keep time with God.

IV. His success, v. 8. He obtained the honour and advantage of a complete victory; he smote them and chased them, in the several ways they took in their flight; some fled towards Zidon, which lay to the northwest, others towards Mizpeh, eastward, but the parties Joshua sent out pursued them each way. *So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel*; they would not deliver themselves into the hands of Israel to be made proselytes and tributaries, and so offered up to God's grace (Rom. xv. 16), and therefore God delivered them into their hands to be made sacrifices to his justice; for God will be honoured by us or upon us.

V. His obedience to the orders given him, in destroying the horses and chariots (v. 9), which was an instance, 1. Of his subjection to the divine will, as one under authority, that must do as he is bidden. 2. Of his self-denial, and crossing his own genius and inclination in compliance with God's command. 3. Of his confidence in the power of God engaged for Israel, which enabled them to despise the chariots and horses which others trusted in, Ps. xx. 7; xxxiii. 17. 4. Of his care to keep up in the people the like confidence in God, by taking that from them which they would be tempted to trust too much to. This was *cutting off a right hand*.

10 And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. 11 And they smote all the souls that *were* therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. 12 And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, *and* he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded. 13 But *as for* the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; *that*

did Joshua burn. 14 And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe.

We have here the same improvement made of this victory as was made of that in the foregoing chapter. 1. The destruction of Hazor is particularly recorded, because in it, and by the king thereof, this daring design against Israel was laid, *v.* 10, 11. The king of Hazor, it seems, escaped with his life out of the battle, and thought himself safe when he had got back into his own city, and Joshua had gone in pursuit of the scattered troops another way. But it proved that that which he thought would be for his welfare was his trap; in it he was taken as in an evil net; there he was slain, and his city, for his sake, burned. Yet we find that the remains of it being not well looked after by Israel the Canaanites rebuilt it, and settled there under another king of the same name, *Judg.* iv. 2. 2. The rest of the cities of that part of the country are spoken of only in general, that Joshua got them all into his hands, but did not burn them as he did Hazor, for Israel was to dwell in great and goodly cities which they builded not (*Deut.* vi. 10) and in these among the rest. And here we find Israel rolling in blood and treasure. (1.) In the blood of their enemies; they smote all the souls (*v.* 11), neither left they any to breathe (*v.* 14), that there might be none to infect them with the abominations of Canaan, and none to disturb them in the possession of it. The children were cut off, lest they should afterwards lay claim to any part of this land in the right of their parents. (2.) In the wealth of their enemies. The spoil, and the cattle, they took for a prey to themselves, *v.* 14. As they were enriched with the spoil of their oppressors when they came out of Egypt, wherewith to defray the charges of their apprenticeship in the wilderness, so they were now enriched with the spoil of their enemies for a stock wherewith to set up in the land of Canaan. Thus is the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just.

15 As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses. 16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; 17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up

to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. 18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. 19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. 20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. 21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. 22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. 23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

We have here the conclusion of this whole matter.

1. A short account is here given of what was done in four things:—1. The obstinacy of the Canaanites in their opposition to the Israelites. It was strange that though it appeared so manifestly that God fought for Israel, and in every engagement the Canaanites had the worst of it, yet they stood it out to the last; not one city made peace with Israel, but the Gibeonites only, who understood the things that belonged to their peace better than their neighbours, *v.* 19. It is intimated that other cities might have made as good terms for themselves, without ragged clothes and clouted shoes, if they would have humbled themselves, but they never so much as desired conditions of peace. We here are told whence this unaccountable infatuation came: *It was of the Lord to harden their hearts, v.* 20. As Pharaoh's heart was hardened by his own pride and wilfulness first, and afterwards by the righteous judgment of God, to his destruction, so were the hearts of these Canaanites. To punish them for all their other follies, God left them to this,

to make those their enemies whom they might have made their friends. This was it that ruined them: they came against Israel in battle, and gave the first blow, and therefore might have no favour shown them. Those know not what they do who give the provocation to divine justice, or the authorized instruments of it. *Are we stronger than God?* Observe here, That hardness of heart is the ruin of sinners. Those that are stupid and secure, and heedless of divine warnings, are already marked for destruction. What hope is there of those concerning whom God has said, *Go, make their hearts fat?* 2. The constancy of the Israelites in prosecuting this war (v. 18): *Joshua made war a long time*; some reckon it five years, others seven, that were spent in subduing this land: so long God would train up Israel to war, and give them repeated instances of his power and goodness in every new victory that he gave them. 3. The conquest of the Anakim at last, v. 21, 22. Either this was done as they met with them where they were dispersed, as some think, or rather it should seem the Anakim had retired to their fastnesses, and so were hunted out and cut off at last, after all the rest of Israel's enemies. The mountains of Judah and Israel were the habitations of those mountains of men; but not their height, nor the strength of their caves, nor the difficulty of the passes to them, could secure, no, not these mighty men, from the sword of Joshua. The cutting off of the sons of Anak is particularly mentioned because these had been such a terror to the spies forty years before, and their bulk and strength had been thought an insuperable difficulty in the way of the reducing of Canaan, Num. xiii. 28, 33. Even that opposition which seemed invincible was got over. Never let the sons of Anak be a terror to the Israel of God, for even their day will come to fall. Giants are dwarfs to Omnipotence; yet this struggle with the Anakim was reserved for the latter end of the war, when the Israelites had become more expert in the arts of war, and had had more experience of the power and goodness of God. Note, God sometimes reserves the sharpest trials of his people by affliction and temptation for the latter end of their days. Therefore *let not him that girds on the harness boast as he that puts it off*. Death, that tremendous son of Anak, is the last enemy that is to be encountered; but it is *to be destroyed*, 1 Cor. xv. 26. Thanks be to God, who will give us the victory. 4. The end and issue of this long war. The Canaanites were rooted out, not perfectly (as we shall find after in the book of Judges), but in a good measure; they were not able to make any head, either, (1.) So as to keep the Israelites out of possession of the land: *Joshua took all that land*, v. 16, 17. And we may suppose the people dispersed themselves and their families into the countries they had conquered, at least those

that lay nearest to the head-quarters at Gilgal, until an orderly distribution should be made by lot, that every man might know his own. Or, (2.) So as to keep them in action, or give them any molestation (v. 23): *The land rested from war*. It ended not in a peace with the Canaanites (that was forbidden), but in a peace from them. There is a rest, a rest from war, remaining for the people of God, into which they shall enter when their warfare is accomplished.

II. That which was now done is here compared with that which had been said to Moses. God's word and his works, if viewed and considered together, will mutually illustrate each other. It is here observed in the close, 1. That all the precepts God had given to Moses relating to the conquest of Canaan were obeyed on the people's part, at least while Joshua lived. See how solemnly this is remarked (v. 15): *As the Lord commanded Moses his servant*, by whose hand the law was given, *so did Moses command Joshua*, for Moses was faithful, as a law-giver, to him that appointed him; he did his part, and then he died: but were the commands of Moses observed when he was in his grave? Yes, they were: *So did Joshua*, who was, in his place, as faithful as Moses in his. *He left nothing undone* (Heb. *he removed nothing*) *of all that the Lord commanded Moses*. Those that leave their duty undone do what they can to remove or make void the command of God, by which they are bound to do it; but Joshua, by performing the precept, *confirmed* it, as the expression is, Deut. xxvii. 26. Joshua was himself a great commander, and yet nothing was more his praise than his obedience. Those that rule others at their will must themselves be ruled by the divine will; then their power is indeed their honour, and not otherwise. The pious obedience for which Joshua is here commended respects especially the command to destroy the Canaanites, and to *break down their altars and burn their images*, Deut. vii. 2—5; Exod. xxiii. 24; xxxiv. 13. Joshua, in his zeal for the Lord of hosts, spared neither the idols nor the idolaters. Saul's disobedience, or rather his partial obedience, to the command of God, for the utter destruction of the Amalekites, cost him his kingdom. It should seem Joshua himself gives this account of his most careful and punctual observance of his orders in the execution of his commission, that in all respects he had done as Moses commanded him; and then it intimates that he had more pleasure and satisfaction in reflecting upon his obedience to the commands of God in all this war, and valued himself more upon that, than upon all the gains and triumphs with which he was enriched and advanced. 2. That all the promises God had given to Moses relating to this conquest were accomplished on his part, v. 23. Joshua *took the whole land*, conquered it, and took possession of it, *according to all that the*

*Lord said unto Moses.* God had promised to drive out the nations before them (Exod. xxxiii. 2; xxxiv. 11), and to *bring them down*, Deut. ix. 3. And now it was done. There failed not one word of the promise. Our successes and enjoyments are then doubly sweet and comfortable to us when we see them flowing to us from the promise (this is *according to what the Lord said*), as our obedience is then acceptable to God when it has an eye to the precept. And, if we make conscience of our duty, we need not question the performance of the promise.

## CHAP. XII.

This chapter is a summary of Israel's conquests. 1 Their conquests under Moses, on the other side Jordan (for we now suppose ourselves in Canaan) eastward, which we had the history of, Num. xxi. 24, &c. And here the abridgment of that history, ver. 1—6. II. Their conquests under Joshua, on this side Jordan, westward. 1. The country they reduced, ver. 7, 8. 2. The kings they subdued, thirty-one in all, ver. 9—24. And this comes in here, not only as a conclusion of the history of the wars of Canaan (that we might at one view see what they had got), but as a preface to the history of the dividing of Canaan, that all that might be put together which they were now to make a distribution of.

**N**OW these *are* the kings of the land, which the children of Israel smote, and possessed their land on the other side Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the river Arnon unto mount Hermon, and all the plain on the east: 2 Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, *and* ruled from Aroer, which *is* upon the bank of the river Arnon, and from the middle of the river, and from half Gilead, even unto the river Jabbok, *which is* the border of the children of Ammon; 3 And from the plain to the sea of Chinneroth on the east, and unto the sea of the plain, *even* the salt sea on the east, the way to Beth-jeshimoth; and from the south, under Ashdath-pisgah: 4 And the coast of Og king of Bashan, *which was* of the remnant of the giants, that dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei, 5 And reigned in mount Hermon, and in Salcah, and in all Bashan, unto the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and half Gilead, the border of Sihon king of Heshbon. 6 Them did Moses the servant of the LORD and the children of Israel smite: and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it *for* a possession unto the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Joshua, or whoever else is the historian, before he comes to sum up the new conquests Israel had made, in these verses recites

their former conquests in Moses's time, under whom they became masters of the great and potent kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Note, Fresh mercies must not drown the remembrance of former mercies, nor must the glory of the present instruments of good to the church be suffered to eclipse and diminish the just honour of those who have gone before them, and who were the blessings and ornaments of their day. Joshua's services and achievements are confessedly great, but let not those under Moses be overlooked and forgotten, since God was the same who wrought both, and both put together proclaim him the Alpha and Omega of Israel's great salvation. Here is, 1. A description of this conquered country, the measure and bounds of it in general (v. 1): *From the river Arnon in the south, to Mount Hermon in the north.* In particular, here is a description of the kingdom of Sihon (v. 2, 3), and that of Og, v. 4, 5. Moses had described this country very particularly (Deut. ii. 36; iii. 4, &c.), and this description here agrees with his. King Og is said to dwell at Ashtaroth and Edrei (v. 4), probably because they were both his royal cities; he had palaces in both, and resided sometimes in one and sometimes in the other; one perhaps was his summer seat and the other his winter seat. But Israel took both from him, and made one grave to serve him that could not be content with one palace. 2. The distribution of this country. Moses assigned it to the two tribes and a half, at their request, and divided it among them (v. 6), of which we had the story at large, Num. xxxii. The dividing of it when it was conquered by Moses is here mentioned as an example to Joshua what he must do now that he had conquered the country on this side Jordan. Moses, in his time, gave to one part of Israel a very rich and fruitful country, but it was on the outside of Jordan; but Joshua gave to all Israel the holy land, the mountain of God's sanctuary, within Jordan: so the law conferred upon some few of God's spiritual Israel external temporal blessings, which were earnest of good things to come; but our Lord Jesus, the true Joshua, has provided for all the children of promise spiritual blessings—the privileges of the sanctuary, and the heavenly Canaan. The triumphs and grants of the law were glorious, but those of the gospel far exceed in glory.

7 And these *are* the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west, from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon even unto the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir; which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel *for* a possession according to their divisions; 8 In the mountains,

and in the valleys, and in the plains, and in the springs, and in the wilderness, and in the south country; the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: 9 The king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Beth-el, one; 10 The king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; 11 The king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; 12 The king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; 13 The king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; 14 The king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; 15 The king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; 16 The king of Makkedah, one; the king of Beth-el, one; 17 The king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one; 18 The king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; 19 The king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; 20 The king of Shimron-meron, one; the king of Achshaph, one; 21 The king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; 22 The king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of Carmel, one; 23 The king of Dor in the coast of Dor, one; the king of the nations of Gilgal, one; 24 The king of Tirzah, one: all the kings thirty and one.

We have here a brief of Joshua's conquests.

I. The limits of the country he conquered. It lay between Jordan on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and extended from Baal-gad near Lebanon in the north to Halak, which lay upon the country of Edom in the south, *v.* 7. The boundaries are more largely described, *Num.* xxxiv. 2, &c. But what is here said is enough to show that God had been as good as his word, and had given them possession of all he had promised them by Moses, if they would but have kept it.

II. The various kinds of land that were found in this country, which contributed both to its pleasantness and to its fruitfulness, *v.* 8. There were mountains, not craggy, and rocky, and barren, which are frightful to the traveller and useless to the inhabitants, but fruitful hills, such as put forth *precious things* (*Deut.* xxxiii. 15), which charmed the spectator's eye and filled the owner's hand. And valleys, not mossy and boggy, but *covered with corn*, *Psa.* lkv. 13. There were plains, and springs to water them;

and even in that rich land there were wildernesses too, or forests, which were not so thickly inhabited as other parts, yet had towns and houses in them, but served as foils to set off the more pleasant and fruitful countries.

III. The several nations that had been in possession of this country—Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, &c., all of them descended from Canaan, the accursed son of Ham, *Gen.* x. 15—18. Seven nations they are called (*Deut.* vii. 1), and so many are there reckoned up, but here six only are mentioned, the Girgashites being either lost or left out, though we find them, *Gen.* x. 16 and xv. 21. Either they were incorporated with some other of these nations, or, as the tradition of the Jews is, upon the approach of Israel under Joshua they all withdrew and went into Africa, leaving their country to be possessed by Israel, with whom they saw it was to no purpose to contend, and therefore they are not named among the nations that Joshua subdued.

IV. A list of the kings that were conquered and subdued by the sword of Israel, some in the field, others in their own cities, thirty-one in all, and very particularly named and counted, it should seem, in the order in which they were conquered; for the catalogue begins with the kings of Jericho and Ai, then takes in the king of Jerusalem and the princes of the south that were in confederacy with him, and then proceeds to those of the northern association. Now, 1. This shows what a very fruitful country Canaan then was, which could support so many kingdoms, and in which so many kings chose to throng together rather than disperse themselves into other countries, which we may suppose not yet inhabited, but where, though they might find more room, they could not expect such plenty and pleasure: this was the land God spied out for Israel; and yet at this day it is one of the most barren, despicable, and unprofitable countries in the world: such is the effect of the curse it lies under, since its possessors rejected Christ and his gospel, as was foretold by Moses, *Deut.* xxix. 23. 2. It shows what narrow limits men's ambition was then confined to. These kings contented themselves with the government, each of them, of one city and the towns and villages that pertained to it; and no one of them, for aught that appears, aimed to make himself master of the rest, but, when there was occasion, all united for the common safety. Yet it should seem that what was wanting in the extent of their territories was made up in the absoluteness of their power, their subjects being all their tenants and vassals, and entirely at their command. 3. It shows how good God was to Israel, in giving them victory over all these kings, and possession of all these kingdoms, and what obligations he hereby laid upon them to *observe his statutes and to keep his laws*, *Psa.* cv. 44, 45.



Here were thirty-one kingdoms, or seignories, to be divided among nine tribes and a half of Israel. Of these there fell to the lot of Judah the kingdoms of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, Egion, Debir, Azad, Libnah, and Anullam, eight in all, besides part of the kingdom of Jerusalem and part of Geder. Benjamin had the kingdoms of Jericho, Ai, Jerusalem, Makkedah, Beth-el, and the nations of Kirgath-ar in all. Simeon and the kingdom of Gornan and part of Geder. Ephraim had the kingdoms of Gezer and Kirath. Manasseh that half-tribe had the kingdoms of Tapuah and Begner, Taanach and Migdo. Asher had the kingdoms of Aphek and Achshaph. Zebulun had the kingdoms of Lasharon, Shimron-meron, and Joknean. Naphtali had the kingdoms of Madon, Hazor, and Kedesh. And Issachar had that of Dor. These were some of the great and famous kings that God smote, for his mercy endureth for ever; and gave their land for a heritage, even a heritage unto Israel his servant, for his mercy endureth for ever. Ps. cxxvii. 17, &c.

CHAP. XIII.

What chapter seems to be account of the dividing of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel is not a narrative but a cartulary and descriptive of that of the conquest of it, and yet it is thought to be inserted in the sacred history, to illustrate the performance of the promise made to the fathers, and the inheritance given to the seed of Jacob, of them and not of any other. The preserving of this distribution would be of great use to the Jewish nation, who were obliged to be true to keep in this first distribution, and not to transfer inheritances from tribe to tribe, Num. xxxiii. 53. It is likewise of use to us for the clearing up of other scriptures; the sacred laws here teach us the geographical description of a country gives us the history of it. And therefore we were to dig up these chapters of land names as indexes and keys to a region where we had a word to search and a law to strive to observe them in our hearts and lives to read; and God give us a heart to search in this chapter, I God himself witness what parts of the country has been staked in the grant to Israel yet remained unpossessed, and was not to possession, ver. 1-6, 11. He appoints him, notwithstanding, to make a distribution of what was conquered, ver. 7-11. To complete his account, ver. 12 a repetition of the distribution Moses had made of the land as the other time occurs: in general ver. 1-11, in particular, the lot of Reuben ver. 12-21, of Dan ver. 22-25, of the half tribe of Manasseh, ver. 26-31.

**N**OW Joshua was old and stricken in years: and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. 2 This is the land that yet remaineth: all the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, 3 From Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines: the Gazathites, and the Ashdochites, the Esikalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites: also the Avites: 4 From the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that is beside the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the borders of the Amorites: 5 And the land of the Gublites, and all Lebanon, toward the sun-

ning, from Baal-gad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath. 6 All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee.

Here, I. God puts Joshua in mind of his old age, c. 1. It is said that Joshua was old and stricken in years, and he and Caleb were at this time the only old men among the thousands of Israel, none except them of all those who were numbered at Mount Sinai being now alive. He had been a man of war from his youth Exod. xvii. 10; but now he yielded to the infirmities of age, with which it is in vain for the stoutest to thank of contesting. It should seem Joshua had not the same strength and vigour in his old age that Moses had: all that come to old age do not find it alike good: generally, the laws of old age are evil days, and such as there is no pleasure in, nor expectation of service from. 2. God takes notice of it to him: God said to him, Thou art old. Note, It is good for those who are old and stricken in years to be put in remembrance of their being so. Some have gray hairs here and there upon them, and perceive it not Eos. vii. 3. they do not care to think of it, and therefore need to be told of it, that they may be quickened to to the work of life, and make preparation for death, which is coming towards their space. But God mentions Joshua's age and growing infirmities, 1. As a reason why he should now by the thoughts of pursuing the war; he cannot expect to see an end of it quickly, for there remained much land, more perhaps than he thought, to be possessed, in several parts remote from each other: and it was not fit that at his age he should be put upon the fatigue of renewing the war, and carrying it to such distant places; no, it was enough for him that he had reduced the body of the country. "Let him be gathered to rest with honour and the thanks of his people for the good services he had done them, and let the conquering of the skirts of the country be left for those that shall come after." As he had entered into the labours of Moses, so let others enter into his, and bring forth the top-stone, the foing of which was reserved for David long after. Observe, God considers the frame of his people, and would not have them burdened with work above their strength. It cannot be expected that old people should do as they have done for God and their country. 2. As a reason why he should speedily apply himself to the dividing of that which he had conquered. That work must be done, and done quickly; it was necessary that as

should preside in the doing of it, and therefore, he being *old and stricken in years*, and not likely to continue long, let him make this his concluding piece of service to God and Israel. All people, but especially old people, should set themselves to do that quickly which must be done before they die, lest death prevent them, Eccl. ix. 10.

II. He gives him a particular account of the land that yet remained unconquered, which was intended for Israel, and which, in due time, they should be masters of if they did not put a bar in their own door. Divers places are here mentioned, some in the south, as the country of the Philistines, governed by five lords, and the land that lay towards Egypt (v. 2, 3), some westward, as that which lay towards the Sidonians (v. 4), some eastward, as all Lebanon (v. 5), some towards the north, as that in the entering in of Hamath, v. 5. Joshua is told this, and he made the people acquainted with it, 1. That they might be the more affected with God's goodness to them in giving them this good land, and might thereby be engaged to love and serve him; for, if this which they had was too little, God would moreover give them such and such things, 2 Sam. xii. 8. 2. That they might not be tempted to make any league, or contract any dangerous familiarity with these their neighbours so as to learn their way, but might rather be jealous of them, as a people that kept them from their right and that they had just cause of quarrel with. 3. That they might keep themselves in a posture for war, and not think of putting off the harness so long as there remained any land to be possessed. Nor must we lay aside our spiritual armour, nor be off our watch, till our victory be completed in the kingdom of glory.

III. He promises that he would make the Israelites masters of all those countries that were yet unsubdued, though Joshua was old and not able to do it, old and not likely to live to see it done. Whatever becomes of us, and however we may be laid aside as despised broken vessels, God will do his own work in his own time (v. 6): *I will drive them out.* The original is emphatic: "*It is I that will do it, I that can do it when thou art dead and gone, and will do it if Israel be not wanting to themselves.*" "I will do it by my Word," so the Chaldee here, as in many other places, "by the eternal Word, the captain of the hosts of the Lord." This promise that he would drive them out from before the children of Israel plainly supposes it as the condition of the promise that the children of Israel must themselves attempt their extirpation, must go up against them, else they could not be said to be driven out before them; if afterwards Israel, through sloth, or cowardice, or affection to these idolaters, sit still and let them alone, they must blame themselves, and not God, if they be not driven out. We must work out our salvation.

and then God will work in us and work with us; we must resist our spiritual enemies, and then God will tread them under our feet; we must go forth to our Christian work and warfare, and then God will go forth before us.

7 Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh. 8 With whom the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond Jordan eastward, *even* as Moses the servant of the LORD gave them; 9 From Aroer, that is upon the bank of the river Arnon, and the city that is in the midst of the river, and all the plain of Medeba unto Dibon; 10 And all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, which reigned in Heshbon, unto the border of the children of Ammon; 11 And Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites, and all mount Hermon, and all Bashan unto Salcah; 12 All the kingdom of Og in Bashan, which reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei, who remained of the remnant of the giants: for these did Moses smite, and cast them out. 13 Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshurites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day. 14 Only unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire *are* their inheritance, as he said unto them. 15 And Moses gave unto the tribe of the children of Reuben *inheritance* according to their families. 16 And their coast was from Aroer, that is on the bank of the river Arnon, and the city that is in the midst of the river, and all the plain by Medeba; 17 Heshbon, and all her cities that *are* in the plain; Dibon, and Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, 18 And Jahaza, and Kedemoth, and Mephath, 19 And Kirjathaim, and Sibmah, and Zarethshahar in the mount of the valley, 20 And Beth-peor, and Ashdodpishgah, and Beth-jeshimoth, 21 And all the cities of the plain, and all the kingdom of

Sihon king of the Amorites, which reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses smote with the princes of Midian, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, *which were* dukes of Sihon, dwelling in the country. 22 Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them. 23 And the border of the children of Reuben was Jordan, and the border *thereof*. This *was* the inheritance of the children of Reuben after their families, the cities and the villages thereof. 24 And Moses gave *inheritance* unto the tribe of Gad, *even* unto the children of Gad according to their families. 25 And their coast was Jazer, and all the cities of Gilead, and half the land of the children of Ammon, unto Aroer that *is* before Rabbah; 26 And from Heshbon unto Ramath-mizpeh, and Betonim; and from Mahanaim unto the border of Debir; 27 And in the valley, Beth-aram, and Beth-nimrah, and Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, Jordan and *his* border, *even* unto the edge of the sea of Chinnereth on the other side Jordan eastward. 28 This *is* the inheritance of the children of Gad after their families, the cities, and their villages. 29 And Moses gave *inheritance* unto the half tribe of Manasseh: and *this was the possession* of the half tribe of the children of Manasseh by their families. 30 And their coast was from Mahanaim, all Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jair, which *are* in Bashan, threescore cities: 31 And half Gilead, and Ashtaroth, and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan, *were pertaining* unto the children of Machir the son of Manasseh, *even* to the one half of the children of Machir by their families. 32 These *are the countries* which Moses did distribute for inheritance in the plains of Moab, on the other side Jordan, by Jericho, eastward. 33 But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not *any* inheritance: the LORD

God of Israel *was* their inheritance, as he said unto them.

Here we have, I. Orders given to Joshua to assign to each tribe its portion of this land, including that which was yet unsubdued, which must be brought into the lot, in a believing confidence that it should be conquered when Israel was multiplied so as to have occasion for it (v. 7): *Now divide this land*. Joshua thought all must be conquered before any must be divided. "No," said God, "there is as much conquered as will serve your turn for the present; divide this, and make your best of it, and wait for the remainder hereafter." Note, We must take the comfort of what we have, though we cannot compass all we would have. Observe,

1. The land must be divided among the several tribes, and they must not always live in common, as now they did. Which way soever a just property is acquired, it is the will of that God who has given the earth to the children of men that there should be such a thing, and that every man should know his own, and not invade that which is another's. The world must be governed, not by force, but right, by the law of equity, not of arms.

2. That it must be divided for an inheritance, though they got it by conquest. (1.) The promise of it came to them as an inheritance from their fathers; the land of promise pertained to the children of promise, who were thus beloved for their fathers' sakes, and in performance of the covenant with them. (2.) The possession of it was to be transmitted by them, as an inheritance to their children. Frequently, what is got by force is soon lost again; but Israel, having an incontestable title to this land by the divine grant, might see it hereby secured as an inheritance to their seed after them, and that God kept this mercy for thousands.

3. That Joshua must not divide it by his own will. Though he was a very wise, just, and good man, it must not be left to him to give what he pleased to each tribe; but he must do it by lot, which referred the matter wholly to God, and to his determination, for he it is that appoints the bounds of our habitation, and every man's judgment must proceed from him. But Joshua must preside in this affair, must manage this solemn appeal to Providence, and see that the lot was drawn fairly and without fraud, and that every tribe did acquiesce in it. The lot indeed *causeth contention to cease*, Prov. xviii. 18. But, if upon this lot any controversy should arise, Joshua by his wisdom and authority must determine it, and prevent any ill consequences of it. Joshua must have the honour of dividing the land, (1.) Because he had undergone the fatigue of conquering it: and when, through his hand, each tribe received its allotment, they would

thereby be made the more sensible of their obligations to him. And what a pleasure must it needs be to a man of such a public spirit as Joshua was to see the people that were so dear to him eating of the labour of his hands! (2.) That he might be herein a type of Christ, who has not only conquered for us the gates of hell, but has opened to us the gates of heaven, and, having purchased the eternal inheritance for all believers, will in due time put them all in possession of it.

11. An account is here given of the distribution of the land on the other side Jordan among the Reubenites, and Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Observe,

1. How this account is introduced. It comes in, (1.) As the reason why this land within Jordan must be divided only to the nine tribes and a half, because the other two and a half were already provided for. (2.) As a pattern to Joshua in the work he had now to do. He had seen Moses distribute that land, which would give him some aid in distributing this, and thence he might take his measures; only this was to be done by lot, but it should seem Moses did that himself, according to the wisdom given unto him. (3.) As an inducement to Joshua to hasten the dividing of this land, that the nine tribes and a half might not be kept any longer than was necessary out of their possession, since their brethren of the two tribes and a half were so well settled in theirs; and God their common Father would not have such a difference made between his children.

2. The particulars of this account.

(1.) Here is a general description of the country that was given to the two tribes and a half, which Moses gave them, even as Moses gave them, v. 8. The repetition implies a ratification of the grant by Joshua. Moses settled this matter, and, as Moses settled it, so shall it rest; Joshua will not, under any pretence whatsoever, go about to alter it. And a reason is intimated why he would not, because Moses was the servant of the Lord, and acted in this matter by secret direction from him and was faithful as a servant. Here we have, [1.] The fixing of the boundaries of this country, by which they were divided from the neighbouring nations, v. 9, &c. Israel must know their own and keep to it, and may not, under pretence of their being God's peculiar people, encroach upon their neighbours, and invade their rights and properties, to which they had a good and firm title by providence, though not, as Israel, a title by promise. [2.] An exception of one part of this country from Israel's possession, though it was in their grant, namely, the Geshurites and the Maachathites, v. 13. They had not leisure to reduce all the remote and obscure corners of the country in Moses's time, and afterwards they had no mind to it, being easy with what they had.

Thus those who are not straitened in God's promises are yet straitened in their own faith, and prayers, and endeavours.

(2.) A very particular account of the inheritances of these two tribes and a half, how they were separated from each other, and what cities, with the towns, villages, and fields, commonly known and reputed to be appurtenances to them, belonged to each tribe. This is very fully and exactly set down in order that posterity might, in reading this history, be the more affected with the goodness of God to their ancestors, when they found what a large and fruitful country, and what abundance of great and famous cities, he put them in possession of (God's grants look best when we descend to the particulars); and also that the limits of every tribe being punctually set down in this authentic record disputes might be prevented, and such contests between the tribes as commonly happen where boundaries have not been adjusted nor this matter brought to a certainty. And we have reason to think that the register here prescribed and published of the lot of each tribe was of great use to Israel in after-ages, was often appealed to, and always acquiesced in, for the determining of *meum* and *tuum*—*mine* and *thine*.

[1.] We have here the lot of the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's first-born, who, though he had lost the dignity and power which pertained to the birthright, yet, it seems, had the advantage of being first served. Perhaps those of that tribe had an eye to this in desiring to be seated on that side Jordan, that, since they could not expect the benefit of the best lot, they might have the credit of the first. Observe, *First*, In the account of the lot of this tribe mention is made of the slaughter, 1. Of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in this country, and might have kept it and his life if he would have been neighbourly, and have suffered Israel to pass through his territories, but, by attempting to oppose them, justly brought ruin upon himself, Num. xxi. 21, &c. 2. Of the princes of Midian, who were slain afterwards in another war (Num. xxxi. 8), and yet are here called *dukes of Sihon*, and are said to be *smitten with him*, because they were either tributaries to him, or, in his opposition to Israel, confederates with him, and hearty in his interests, and his fall made way for theirs not long after. 3. Of Balaam particularly, that would, if he could, have cursed Israel, and was soon after recompensed according to the wickedness of his endeavour (Ps. xxviii. 4), for he fell with those that set him on. This was recorded before (Num. xxxi. 8), and is here repeated, because the defeating of Balaam's purpose to curse Israel was the turning of that curse into a blessing, and was such an instance of the power and goodness of God as was fit to be had in everlasting remembrance. See Mic. vi. 5. *Secondly*, Within the lot of this tribe was

that Mount Pisgah from the top of which Moses took his view of the earthly Canaan and his flight to the heavenly. And not far off thence Elijah was when he was fetched up to heaven in a chariot of fire. The separation of this tribe from the rest, by the river Jordan, was that which Deborah lamented; and the preference they gave to their private interests above the public was what she censured, Judg. v. 15, 16. In this tribe lay Heshbon and Sibmah, famed for their fruitful fields and vineyards. See Isa. xvi. 8, 9; Jer. xlviii. 32. This tribe, with that of Gad, was sorely shaken by Hazael king of Syria (2 Kings x. 33), and afterwards dislodged and carried into captivity, twenty years before the general captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria, 1 Chron. v. 26.

[2.] The lot of the tribe of Gad, v. 24—28. This lay north of Reuben's lot; the country of Gilead lay in this tribe, so famous for its balm that it is thought strange indeed if there be no balm in Gilead, and the cities of Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead which we often read of in scripture. Succoth and Penuel, which we read of in the story of Gideon, were in this tribe; and that forest which is called the *wood of Ephraim* (from the slaughter Jephthah made there of the Ephraimites), in which Absalom's rebellious army was beaten, while his father David lay at Mahanaim, one of the frontier-cities of this tribe, v. 26. Sharon, famous for roses, was in this tribe. And within the limits of this tribe lived those Gadarenes that loved their swine better than their Saviour, fitter to be called *Girgashites* than *Israelites*.

[3.] The lot of the half-tribe of Manasseh, v. 29—31. Bashan, the kingdom of Og, was in this allotment, famous for the best timber, witness the oaks of Bashan—and the best breed of cattle, witness the bulls and rams of Bashan. This tribe lay north of Gad, reached to Mount Hermon, and had in it part of Gilead. Mizpeh was in this half-tribe, and Jephthah was one of its ornaments; so was Elijah, for in this tribe was Tishbe, whence he is called the Tishbite; and Jair was another. In the edge of the tribe stood Chorazin, honoured with Christ's wondrous works, but ruined by his righteous woe for not improving them.

[4.] Twice in this chapter it is taken notice of that to the tribe of Levi *Moses gave no inheritance* (v. 14, 33), for so God had appointed, Num. xviii. 20. If they had been appointed to a lot entire by themselves, Moses would have served them first, not because it was his own tribe, but because it was God's; but they must be provided for in another manner; their habitations must be scattered in all the tribes, and their maintenance brought out of all the tribes, and God himself was the portion both of their inheritance and of their cup, Deut. x. 9; xviii. 2.

## CHAP. XIV

Here is, 1. The general method that was taken in dividing the land, ver. 1—5. 11. The demand Caleb made of Hebron, as his by promise, and therefore not to be put into the lot with the rest, ver. 6—12. And Joshua's grant of that demand, ver. 13—15. This was done at Gilgal, which was as yet their head-quarters.

AND these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance to them. 2 By lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half tribe. 3 For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and a half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. 4 For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance. 5 As the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did, and they divided the land.

The historian, having in the foregoing chapter given an account of the disposal of the countries on the other side Jordan, now comes to tell us what they did with the countries in the land of Canaan. They were not conquered to be left desert, a *habitation for dragons, and a court for owls*, Isa. xxxiv. 13. No, the Israelites that had hitherto been closely encamped in a body, and the greatest part of them such as never knew any other way of living, must now disperse themselves to replenish these new conquests. It is said of the earth, *God created it not in vain; he formed it to be inhabited*, Isa. xlv. 18. Canaan would have been subdued in vain if it had not been inhabited. Yet every man might not go and settle where he pleased, but as there seems to have been in the days of Peleg an orderly and regular division of the habitable earth among the sons of Noah (Gen. x. 25, 32), so there was now such a division of the land of Canaan among the sons of Jacob. God had given Moses directions how this distribution should be made, and those directions are here punctually observed. See Num. xxvi. 53, &c.

1. The managers of this great affair were Joshua the chief magistrate, Eleazar the chief priest, and ten princes, one of each of the tribes that were now to have their inheritance, whom God himself had nominated (Num. xxxiv. 17, &c.) some years before; and, it should seem, they were all now in being.

and attended this service, that every tribe, having a representative of its own, might be satisfied that there was fair dealing, and might the more contentedly sit down by its lot.

II. The tribes among whom this dividand was to be made were nine and a half. 1. Not the two and a half that were already seated (*v.* 3), though perhaps now that they saw what a good land Canaan was, and how effectually it was subdued, they might some of them repent their choice, and wish they had now been to have their lot with their brethren, upon which condition they would gladly have given up what they had on the other side Jordan; but it could not be admitted: they had made their election without power of revocation, and so must their doom be; they themselves have decided it, and they must adhere to their choice. 2. Not the tribe of Levi; this was to be otherwise provided for. God had distinguished them from, and dignified them above, the other tribes, and they must not now mingle themselves with them, nor cast in their lot among them, for this would entangle them in the affairs of this life, which would not consist with a due attendance on their sacred function. But, 3. Joseph made two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, pursuant to Jacob's adoption of Joseph's two sons, and so the number of the tribes was kept up to twelve, though Levi was taken out, which is intimated here (*v.* 4): *The children of Joseph were two tribes, therefore they gave no part to Levi, they being twelve without them.*

III. The rule by which they went was the lot, *v.* 2. *The disposal of that is of the Lord,* Prov. xvi. 33. It was here used in an affair of weight, and which could not otherwise be accommodated to universal satisfaction, and it was used in a solemn religious manner as an appeal to God, by consent of parties. In dividing by lot, 1. They referred themselves to God, and to his wisdom and sovereignty, believing him fitter to determine for them than they for themselves. Ps. xlvii. 4, *He shall choose our inheritance for us.* 2. They professed a willingness to abide by the determination of it; for every man must take what is his lot, and make the best of it. In allusion to this we are said to *obtain an inheritance in Christ* (Eph. i. 11), *ἐκλήρωθημεν* — *we have obtained it by lot*, so the word signifies; for it is obtained by a divine designation. Christ, our Joshua, gives eternal life to *as many as were given him*, John xvii. 2.

6 Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea. 7 Forty years old *was* I when Moses the ser-

vant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as *it was* in mine heart. 8 Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD my God. 9 And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God. 10 And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while *the children of Israel* wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I *am* this day fourscore and five years old. 11 As yet I *am as strong* this day as I *was* in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength *was* then, even so *is* my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. 12 Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims *were* there, and *that* the cities *were* great and fenced: if so be the LORD *will be* with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said. 13 And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. 14 Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel. 15 And the name of Hebron before *was* Kirjath-arba; *which Arba was* a great man among the Anakims. And the land had rest from war.

Before the lot was cast into the lap for the determining of the portions of the respective tribes, the particular portion of Caleb was assigned to him. He was now, except Joshua, not only the oldest man in all Israel, but was twenty years older than any of them, for all that were above twenty years old when he was forty were dead in the wilderness; it was fit therefore that this phoenix of his age should have some particular marks of honour put upon him in the dividing of the land.

Now, I. Caleb here presents his petition, or

rather makes his demand, to have Hebron given him for a possession (*this mountain* he calls it, *v. 12*), and not to have that put into the lot with the other parts of the country. To justify his demand, he shows that God had long since, by Moses, promised him *that very mountain*; so that God's mind being already made known in this matter it would be a vain and needless thing to consult it any further by casting lots, by which we are to appeal to God in those cases only which cannot otherwise be decided, not in those which, like this, are already determined. Caleb is here called the *Kenezite*, some think from some remarkable victory obtained by him over the Kenezites, as the Romans gave their great generals titles from the countries they conquered, as Africanus, Germanicus, &c. Observe,

1. To enforce his petition, (1.) He brings the children of Judah, that is, the heads and great men of that tribe, along with him, to present it, who were willing thus to pay their respects to that ornament of their tribe, and to testify their consent that he should be provided for by himself, and that they would not take it as any reflection upon the rest of this tribe. Caleb was the person whom God had chosen out of that tribe to be employed in dividing the land (*Num. xxxiv. 19*), and therefore, lest he should seem to improve his authority as a commissioner for his own private advantage and satisfaction, he brings his brethren along with him, and, waiving his own power, seems rather to rely upon their interest. (2.) He appeals to Joshua himself concerning the truth of the allegations upon which he grounded his petition; *Thou knowest the thing, v. 6.* (3.) He makes a very honourable mention of Moses, which he knew would not be at all displeasing to Joshua: Moses the *man of God* (*v. 6*), and the *servant of the Lord, v. 7*. What Moses said he took as from God himself, because Moses was his mouth and his agent, and therefore he had reason both to desire and expect that it should be made good. What can be more earnestly desired than the tokens of God's favour? And what more confidently expected than the grants of his promise?

2. In his petition he sets forth,

(1.) The testimony of his conscience concerning his integrity in the management of that great affair on which it proved the fate of Israel turned, the spying out of the land. Caleb was one of the twelve that were sent out on that errand (*v. 7*), and he now reflected upon it with comfort, and mentioned it, not in pride, but as that which, being the consideration of the grant, was necessary to be inserted in the plea, [1.] That he made his report as it was in his heart, that is, he spoke as he thought when he spoke so honourably of the land of Canaan, so confidently of the power of God to put them in possession of it, and so contemptibly of the op-

position that the Canaanites, even the Anakim themselves, could make against them, as we find he did, *Num. xiii. 30; xiv. 7—9*. He did not do it merely to please Moses, or to keep the people quiet, much less from a spirit of contradiction to his fellows, but from a full conviction of the truth of what he said and a firm belief of the divine promise. [2.] That herein he *wholly followed the Lord his God*, that is, he kept close to his duty, and sincerely aimed at the glory of God in it. He conformed himself to the divine will with an eye to the divine favour. He had obtained this testimony from God himself (*Num. xiv. 24*), and therefore it was not vain-glory in him to speak of it, any more than it is for those who have *God's Spirit witnessing with their spirits* that they are the children of God humbly and thankfully to tell others for their encouragement what God has done for their souls. Note, Those that follow God fully when they are young shall have both the credit and comfort of it when they are old, and the reward of it for ever in the heavenly Canaan. [3.] That he did this when all his brethren and companions in that service, except Joshua, did otherwise. They *made the heart of the people melt* (*v. 8*), and how pernicious the consequences of it were was very well known. It adds much to the praise of following God if we adhere to him when others desert and decline from him. Caleb needed not to mention particularly Joshua's conduct in this matter; it was sufficiently known, and he would not seem to flatter him; it was enough to say (*v. 6*), *Thou knowest what the Lord spoke concerning me and thee*.

(2.) The experience he had had of God's goodness to him ever since to this day. Though he had wandered with the rest in the wilderness, and had been kept thirty-eight years out of Canaan as they were, for that sin which he was so far from having a hand in that he had done his utmost to prevent it, yet, instead of complaining of this, he mentions, to the glory of God, his mercy to him in two things:—[1.] That he was kept alive in the wilderness, not only notwithstanding the common perils and fatigues of that tedious march, but though all that generation of Israelites, except himself and Joshua, were one way or other cut off by death. With what a grateful sense of God's goodness to him does he speak it! (*v. 10*). *Now behold* (behold and wonder) *the Lord hath kept me alive these forty and five years, thirty-eight years in the wilderness, through the plagues of the desert, and seven years in Canaan through the perils of war!* Note, *First*, While we live, it is God that keeps us alive; by his power he protects us from death, and by his bounty supplies us continually with the supports and comforts of life. *He holdeth our soul in life.* *Secondly*, The longer we live the more sensible we should be of God's goodness to us in keep-

ing us alive, his care in prolonging our frail lives, his patience in prolonging our forfeited lives. Has he kept me alive these forty-five years? Is it about that time of life with us? Or is it more? Or is it less? We have reason to say, *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.* How much are we indebted to the favour of God, and what shall we render? Let the life thus kept by the providence of God be devoted to his praise. *Thirdly,* The death of many others round about us should make us the more thankful to God for sparing us and keeping us alive. Thousands falling on our right hand and our left and yet ourselves spared. These distinguishing favours impose on us strong obligations to singular obedience. [2.] That he was fit for business, now that he was in Canaan. Though eighty-five years old, yet as hearty and lively as when he was forty (c. 11): *As my strength was then, so is it now.* This was the fruit of the promise, and out-did what was said; for God not only gives what he promises, but he gives more: life by promise shall be life, and health, and strength, and all that which will make the promised life a blessing and comfort. Moses had said in his prayer (Ps. xc. 10) that at *eighty years old* even *his strength is labour and sorrow*, and so it is most commonly. But Caleb was an exception to the rule; his strength at eighty-five was ease and joy: this he got by *following the Lord fully.* Caleb here takes notice of this to the glory of God, and as an excuse for his asking a portion which he must fetch out of the giants' hands. Let not Joshua tell him he *knew not what he asked*: could he get the possession of that which he begged for a title to? "Yes," says he, "why not? I am as fit for war now as ever I was."

(3.) The promise Moses had made him in God's name that he should have *this mountain*, v. 9. This promise is his chief plea, and that on which he relies. As we find it (Num. xiv. 24) it is general, *him will I bring into the land whereunto he went, and his seed shall possess it*; but it seems it was more particular, and Joshua knew it; both sides understood this mountain for which Caleb was now a suitor to be intended. This was the place from which, more than any other, the spies took their report, for here they met with the sons of Anak (Num. xiii. 22), the sight of whom made such an impression upon them, v. 33. We may suppose that Caleb, observing what stress they laid upon the difficulty of conquering Hebron, a city garrisoned by the giants, and how thence they inferred that the conquest of the whole land was utterly impracticable, in opposition to their suggestions, and to convince the people that he spoke as he thought, bravely desired to have that city which they called *invincible* assigned to himself for his own portion: "I will undertake to deal with that, and, if I cannot get it for my inheritance, I will be

without." "Well," said Moses, "it shall be thy own then, win it and wear it." Such a noble heroic spirit Caleb had, and so desirous was he to inspire his brethren with it, that he chose this place only because it was the most difficult to be conquered. And, to show that his soul did not decay any more than his body, now forty-five years after he adheres to his choice and is still of the same mind.

(4.) The hopes he had of being master of it, though the sons of Anak were in possession of it (c. 12): *If the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out.* The city of Hebron Joshua had already reduced (ch. x. 37), but the mountain which belonged to it, and which was inhabited by the sons of Anak, was yet unconquered; for though the cutting off of the Anakim from Hebron was mentioned ch. xi. 21, because the historian would relate all the military actions together, yet it seems it was not conquered till after they had begun to divide the land. Observe, He builds his hopes of driving out the sons of Anak upon the presence of God with him. He does not say, "Because I am now as strong for war as I was at forty, therefore I shall drive them out," depending upon his personal valour; nor does he depend upon his interest in the warlike tribe of Judah, who attended him now in making this address, and no doubt would assist him; nor does he court Joshua's aid, or put it upon that, "If thou wilt be with me I shall gain my point." But, *If the Lord will be with me.* Here, [1.] He seems to speak doubtfully of God's being with him, not from any distrust of his goodness or faithfulness. He had spoken without the least hesitation of God's presence with Israel in general (Num. xiv. 9); *the Lord is with us.* But for himself, from a humble sense of his own unworthiness of such a favour, he chooses to express himself thus, *If the Lord will be with me.* The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *If the Word of the Lord be my helper*, that Word which is God, and in the fulness of time was made flesh, and is the captain of our salvation. [2.] But he expresses without the least doubt his assurance that if God were with him he should be able to dispossess the sons of Anak. "If God be with us, *If God be for us, who can be against us, so as to prevail?*" It is also intimated that if God were not with him, though all the forces of Israel should come in to his assistance, he should not be able to gain his point. Whatever we undertake, God's favourable presence with us is all in all to our success; this therefore we must earnestly pray for, and carefully make sure of, by keeping ourselves in the love of God; and on this we must depend, and from this take our encouragement against the greatest difficulties.

3. Upon the whole matter, Caleb's request is (c. 12), *Give me this mountain*, (1.



Because it was formerly in God's promise, and he would let Israel know how much he valued the promise, insisting upon *this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day*, as most desirable, though perhaps as good a portion might have fallen to him by lot in common with the rest. Those that live by faith value that which is given by promise far above that which is given by providence only. (2.) Because it was now in the Anakim's possession, and he would let Israel know how little he feared the enemy, and would by his example animate them to push on their conquests. Herein Caleb answered his name, which signifies *all heart*.

II. Joshua grants his petition (v. 13): *Joshua blessed him*, commended his bravery, applauded his request, and gave him what he asked. He also *prayed* for him, and for his good success in his intended undertaking against the sons of Anak. Joshua was both a prince and a prophet, and upon both accounts it was proper for him to give Caleb his blessing, for *the less is blessed of the better*. Hebron was settled on Caleb and his heirs (v. 14), because he *wholly followed the Lord God of Israel*. And happy are we if we follow him. Note, Singular piety shall be crowned with singular favours. Now, 1. We are here told what Hebron had been, the city of Arba, a great man among the Anakim (v. 15); we find it called *Kirjath-arba* (Gen. xxiii. 2), as the place where Sarah died. Hereabouts Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived most of their time in Canaan, and near to it was the cave of Machpelah, where they were buried, which perhaps had led Caleb hither when he went to spy out the land, and had made him covet this rather than any other part for his inheritance. 2. We are afterwards told what Hebron was. (1.) It was one of the cities belonging to the priests (Josh. xxi. 13., and a *city of refuge*, Josh. xx. 7. When Caleb had it, he contented himself with the country about it, and cheerfully gave the city to the priests, the Lord's ministers, thinking it could not be better bestowed, no, not upon his own children, nor that it was the less his own for being thus devoted to God. (2.) It was a royal city, and in the beginning of David's reign, the metropolis of the kingdom of Judah; thither the people resorted to him, and there he reigned seven years. Thus highly was Caleb's city honoured; it is a pity there should have been such a blemish upon his family long after as Nabal was, who was of the *house of Caleb*, 1 Sam. xxv. 3. But the best men cannot entail their virtues.

## CHAP. XV.

Though the land was not completely conquered, yet being (as was said in the close of the foregoing chapter) at rest from war for the present, and their armies all drawn out of the field to a general rendezvous at Gilgal, there they began to divide the land, though the work was afterwards perfected at Shiloh, ch. xviii. 1, &c. In this chapter we have the lot of the tribe of Judah, which in this, as in other things, had the precedence. 1. The borders or bounds of the inheritance of Judah, ver. 1-12. II. The particular assignment of Hebron and the country thereabout to Caleb and his family, ver. 13-19. III. The names of the several cities that fell within Judah's lot, ver. 20-43.

**T**HIS then was the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah by their families; *even to the border of Edom the wilderness of Zin southward was the uttermost part of the south coast.* 2 And their south border was from the shore of the salt sea, from the bay that looketh southward: 3 And it went out to the south side to Maaleh-acrabbim, and passed along to Zin, and ascended up on the south side unto Kadesh-barnea, and passed along to Hezron, and went up to Adar, and fetched a compass to Karkaa: 4 *From thence* it passed toward Azmon, and went out unto the river of Egypt; and the goings out of that coast were at the sea: this shall be your south coast. 5 And the east border was the salt sea, *even* unto the end of Jordan. And their border in the north quarter was from the bay of the sea at the uttermost part of Jordan: 6 And the border went up to Beth-hogla, and passed along by the north of Beth-arabah; and the border went up to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben: 7 And the border went up toward Debir from the valley of Achor, and so northward, looking toward Gilgal, that is before the going up to Adummim, which is on the south side of the river: and the border passed toward the waters of En-shemesh, and the goings out thereof were at En-rogel: 8 And the border went up by the valley of the son of Hinnom unto the south side of the Jebusite; the same is Jerusalem: and the border went up to the top of the mountain that lieth before the valley of Hinnom westward, which is at the end of the valley of the giants northward: 9 And the border was drawn from the top of the hill unto the fountain of the water of Nephtoah, and went out to the cities of mount Ephron; and the border was drawn to Baalah, which is Kirjath-jearim: 10 And the border compassed from Baalah westward unto mount Seir, and passed along unto the side of mount Jearim, which is Chesalon, on the north side, and went down to Beth-shemesh, and passed on to Tim-

nah: 11 And the border went out unto the side of Ekron northward: and the border was drawn to Shieron, and passed along to mount Baalah, and went out unto Jabneel; and the goings out of the border were at the sea. 12 And the west border was to the great sea, and the coast thereof. This is the coast of the children of Judah round about according to their families.

Judah and Joseph were the two sons of Jacob on whom Reuben's forfeited birth-right devolved. Judah had the dominion entailed on him, and Joseph the double portion, and therefore these two tribes were first seated, Judah in the southern part of the land of Canaan and Joseph in the northern part, and on them the other seven did attend, and had their respective lots as appurtenances to these two; the lots of Benjamin, Simeon, and Dan, were appendant to Judah, and those of Issachar and Zebulun, Naphtali and Asher, to Joseph. These two were first set up to be provided for, it should seem, before there was such an exact survey of the land as we find afterwards, *ch. xviii. 9*. It is probable that the most considerable parts of the northern and southern countries, and those that lay nearest to Gilgal, and which the people were best acquainted with, were first put into two portions, and the lot was cast upon them between these two principal tribes, of the one of which Joshua was, and of the other Caleb, who was the first commissioner in this writ of partition; and, by the decision of that lot, the southern country, of which we have an account in this chapter, fell to Judah, and the northern, of which we have an account in the two following chapters, to Joseph. And when this was done there was a more equal dividend (either in quantity or quality) of the remainder among the seven tribes. And this, probably, was intended in that general rule which was given concerning this partition (*Num. xxxiii. 54*), *to the more you shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer you shall give the less, and every man's inheritance shall be where his lot falleth*; that is, "You shall appoint two greater portions which shall be determined by lot to those more numerous tribes of Judah and Joseph, and then the rest shall be less portions to be allotted to the less numerous tribes." The former was done in Gilgal, the latter in Shiloh.

In these verses, we have the borders of the lot of Judah, which, as the rest, is said to be by their families, that is, with an eye to the number of their families. And it intimates that Joshua and Eleazar, and the rest of the commissioners, when they had by lot given each tribe its portion, did afterwards

(it is probable by lot likewise) subdivide those larger portions, and assign to each family its inheritance, and then to each household, which would be better done by this supreme authority, and be apt to give less disgust than if it had been left to the inferior magistrates of each tribe to make that distribution. The borders of this tribe are here largely fixed, yet not unalterably, for a good deal of that which lies within these bounds was afterwards assigned to the lots of Simeon and Dan. 1. The eastern border was all, and only, the Salt Sea, *r. 5*. Every sea is salt, but this was of an extraordinary and more than natural saltness, the effects of that fire and brimstone with which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in Abraham's time, whose ruins lie buried in the bottom of this dead water, which never either was moved itself or had any living thing in it. 2. The southern border was that of the land of Canaan in general, as will appear by comparing *r. 1—4* with *Num. xxxiv. 3—5*. So that this powerful and warlike tribe of Judah guarded the frontiers of the whole land, on that side which lay towards their old sworn enemies (though their two fathers were twin-brethren), the Edomites. Our Lord therefore, who sprang out of Judah, and whose the kingdom is, shall judge the mount of Esau, *Obad. 21*. 3. The northern border divided it from the lot of Benjamin. In this, mention is made of the stone of Bohan a Reubenite (*r. 6*), who probably was a great commander of those forces of Reuben that came over Jordan, and died in the camp at Gilgal, and was buried not far off under this stone. The valley of Achor likewise lies upon this border (*r. 7*), to remind the men of Judah of the trouble which Achan, one of their tribe, gave to the congregation of Israel, that they might not be too much lifted up with their services. This northern line touched closely upon Jerusalem (*r. 8*), so closely as to include in the lot of this tribe Mount Zion and Mount Moriah, though the greater part of the city lay in the lot of Benjamin. 4. The west border went near to the great sea at first (*r. 12*), but afterwards the lot of the tribe of Dan took off a good part of Judah's lot on that side; for the lot was only to determine between Judah and Joseph, which should have the north and which the south, and not immovably to fix the border of either. Judah's inheritance had its boundaries determined. Though it was a powerful warlike tribe, and had a great interest in the other tribes, yet they must not therefore be left to their own choice, to enlarge their possessions at pleasure, but must live so as that their neighbours might live by them. Those that are placed high yet must not think to be placed alone in the midst of the earth.

13 And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among

the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the LORD to Joshua, *even the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron.* 14 And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak. 15 And he went up thence to the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher. 16 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 17 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 18 And it came to pass, as she came unto him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, what wouldest thou? 19 Who answered, Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs.

The historian seems pleased with every occasion to make mention of Caleb and to do him honour, because he had honoured God in following him fully. Observe,

I. The grant Joshua made him of the mountain of Hebron for his inheritance is here repeated (v. 13), and it is said to be given him, 1. *According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua.* Though Caleb, in his petition, had made out a very good title to it by promise, yet, because God had ordered Joshua to divide the land by lot, he would not in this one single instance, no, not to gratify his old friend Caleb, do otherwise, without orders from God, whose oracle, it is probable, he consulted upon this occasion. In every doubtful case it is very desirable to know the mind of God, and to see the way of our duty plain. 2. It is said to be a part *among the children of Judah*; though it was assigned him before the lot of that tribe came up, yet it proved, God so directing the lot, to be in the heart of that tribe, which was graciously ordered in kindness to him, that he might not be as one separated from his brethren and surrounded by those of other tribes.

II. Caleb having obtained this grant, we are told,

1. How he signalized his own valour in the conquest of Hebron (v. 14): *He drove thence the three sons of Anak*, he and those that he engaged to assist him in this service. This is mentioned here to show that the confidence he had expressed of success in this

affair, through the presence of God with him (ch. xiv. 12), did not deceive him, but the event answered his expectation. It is not said that he *slaw these giants*, but he *drove them thence*, which intimates that they retired upon his approach and fled before him; the strength and stature of their bodies could not keep up the courage of their minds, but with the countenances of lions they had the hearts of trembling hares. Thus does God often cut off the spirit of princes (Ps. lxxvi. 12), *take away the heart of the chief of the people* (Job xii. 24), and so shame the confidence of the proud; and thus if we resist the devil, that roaring lion, though he fall not, yet he will flee.

2. How he encouraged the valour of those about him in the conquest of Debir, v. 15, &c. It seems, though Joshua had once made himself master of Debir (ch. x. 39), yet the Canaanites had regained the possession in the absence of the army, so that the work had to be done a second time; and when Caleb had completed the reduction of Hebron, which was for himself and his own family, to show his zeal for the public good, as much as for his own private interest, he pushes on his conquest to Debir, and will not lay down his arms till he sees that city also effectually reduced, which lay but ten miles southward from Hebron, though he had not any particular concern in it, but the reducing of it would be to the general advantage of his tribe. Let us learn hence not to seek and mind our own things only, but to concern and engage ourselves for the welfare of the community we are members of; we are not born for ourselves, nor must we *live to ourselves*.

(1.) Notice is taken of the name of this city. It had been called *Kirjath-sepher*, the city of a book, and *Kirjath-sannah* (v. 49), which some translate the city of learning (so the LXX. Πόλις γραμμάτων), whence some conjecture that it had been a university among the Canaanites, like Athens in Greece, in which their youth were educated; or perhaps the books of their chronicles or records, or the antiquities of the nation, were laid up there; and, it may be, this was it that made Caleb so desirous to see Israel master of this city, that they might get acquainted with the ancient learning of the Canaanites.

(2.) The proffer that Caleb made of his daughter, and a good portion with her, to any one that would undertake to reduce that city, and to command the forces that should be employed in that service, v. 16. Thus Saul promised a daughter to him that would kill Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 25), neither of them intending to force his daughter to marry such as she could not love, but both of them presuming upon their daughters' obedience, and submission to their fathers' will, though it might perhaps be contrary to their own humour or inclination. Caleb's family was not only honourable and wealthy,

but religious; he that himself followed the Lord fully no doubt taught his children to do so, and therefore it could not but be a desirable match to any young gentleman. Caleb, in making the proposal, aims, [1.] To do service to his country by the reducing of that important place; and, [2.] To marry a daughter well, to a man of learning, that would have a particular affection for the city of books, and a man of war, that would be likely to serve his country, and do worthily in his generation. Could he but marry his child to a man of such a character, he would think her well bestowed, whether the share in the lot of his tribe were more or less.

(3.) The place was bravely taken by Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, whom probably Caleb had thoughts of when he made the proffer, v. 17. This Othniel, who thus signaled himself when he was young, had long after, in his advanced years, the honour to be both a deliverer and a judge in Israel, the first single person that presided in their affairs after Joshua's death. It is good for those who are setting out in the world to begin betimes with that which is great and good, that, excelling in service when they are young, they may excel in honour when they grow old.

(4.) Hereupon (all parties being agreed) Othniel married his cousin-german Achsah, Caleb's daughter. It is probable that he had a kindness for her before, which put him upon this bold undertaking to obtain her. Love to his country, an ambition of honour, and a desire to find favour with the princes of his people, might not have engaged him in this great action, but his affection for Achsah did. This made it intolerable to him to think that any one should do more to win her favour than he would, and so inspired him with this generous fire. Thus is love strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave.

(5.) Because the historian is now upon the dividing of the land, he gives us an account of Achsah's portion, which was in land, as more valuable because enjoyed by virtue of the divine promise, though we may suppose the conquerors of Canaan, who had had the spoil of so many rich cities, were full of money too. [1.] Some land she obtained by Caleb's free grant, which was allowed while she married within her own tribe and family, as Zelophehad's daughters did. He gave her a south land, v. 19. Land indeed, but a south land, dry, and apt to be parched. [2.] She obtained more upon her request; she would have had her husband to ask for a field, probably some particular field, or champaign ground, which belonged to Caleb's lot, and joined to that south land which he had settled upon his daughter at marriage. She thought her husband had the best interest in her father, who, no doubt, was extremely pleased with his late glorious achievement, but he thought it was more proper for her to ask, and she

would be more likely to prevail; accordingly she did, submitting to her husband's judgment, though contrary to her own; and she managed the undertaking with great address. *First*, She took the opportunity when her father brought her home to the house of her husband, when the satisfaction of having disposed of his daughter so well would make him think nothing too much to do for her. *Secondly*, She lighted off her ass, in token of respect and reverence to her father, whom she would honour still, as much as before her marriage. She cried or sighed from off her ass, so the LXX. and the vulgar Latin read it; she expressed some grief and concern, that she might give her father occasion to ask her what she wanted. *Thirdly*, She calls it a blessing, because it would add much to the comfort of her settlement; and she was sure that, since she married not only with her father's consent, but in obedience to his command, he would not deny her his blessing. *Fourthly*, She asks only for the water, without which the ground she had would be of little use either for tillage or pasture, but she means the field in which the springs of water were. The modesty and reasonableness of her request gave it a great advantage. Earth without water would be like a tree without sap, or the body of an animal without blood; therefore, when God gathered the waters into one place, he wisely and graciously left some in every place, that the earth might be enriched for the service of man. See Ps. civ. 10, &c. Well, Achsah gained her point; her father gave her what she asked, and perhaps more, for he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs, two fields so called from the springs that were in them, as we commonly distinguish between the higher field and the lower field. Those who understand it but of one field, watered both with the rain of heaven and the springs that issued out of the bowels of the earth, give countenance to the allusion we commonly make to this, when we pray for spiritual and heavenly blessings which relate to our souls as blessings of the upper springs, and those which relate to the body and the life that now is as blessings of the nether springs.

From this story we learn, 1. That it is no breach of the tenth commandment moderately to desire those comforts and conveniences of this life which we see attainable in a fair and regular way. 2. That husbands and wives should mutually advise, and jointly agree, about that which is for the common good of their family; and much more should they concur in asking of their heavenly Father the best blessings, those of the upper springs. 3. That parents must never think that lost which is bestowed upon their children for their real advantage, but must be free in giving them portions as well as maintenance, especially when they are dutiful. Caleb had sons (1 Chron. iv. 15), and

yet gave thus liberally to his daughter: Those parents forget themselves and their relation who grudge their children what is convenient for them when they can conveniently part with it.

20 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families. 21 And the uttermost cities of the tribe of the children of Judah toward the coast of Edom southward were Kabzeel, and Eder, and Jagur, 22 And Kinah, and Dimonah, and Adadah, 23 And Kedesh, and Hazor, and Ithnan, 24 Ziph, and Telem, and Bealoth, 25 And Hazor, Hadattah, and Kerioth, and Hezron, which is Hazor, 26 Amam, and Shema, and Moladah, 27 And Hazar-gaddah, and Heshmon, and Beth-palet, 28 And Hazarshual, and Beer-sheba, and Bizjothjah, 29 Baalah, and Im, and Azem, 30 And Eltolad, and Chesil, and Hormah, 31 And Ziklag, and Madmannah, and Sansannah, 32 And Lebaoth, and Shilhim, and Ain, and Rimmon: all the cities are twenty and nine, with their villages: 33 And in the valley, Eshtaol, and Zoreah, and Ashnah, 34 And Zanoah, and En-gannim, Tappuah, and Enam, 35 Jarmuth, and Adullam, Socoh, and Azekah, 36 And Shairaim, and Adithaim, and Gederah, and Gederothaim; fourteen cities with their villages: 37 Zenan, and Hadashah, and Migdal-gad, 38 And Dilean, and Mizpeh, and Joktheel, 39 Lachish, and Bozkath, and Eglon, 40 And Cabbon, and Lahmam, and Kithlish, 41 And Gederoth, Beth-dagon, and Naamah, and Makkedah; sixteen cities with their villages: 42 Libnah, and Ether, and Ashan, 43 And Jiphtah, and Ashnah, and Nezib, 44 And Keilah, and Achzib, and Mareshah; nine cities with their villages: 45 Ekron, with her towns and her villages: 46 From Ekron even unto the sea, all that lay near Ashdod, with their villages: 47 Ashdod with her towns and her villages, Gaza with her towns and her villages, unto the river of Egypt, and the great sea, and the border thereof: 48 And in

the mountains, Shamir, and Jattir, and Socoh, 49 And Danah, and Kirjath-sannah, which is Debir, 50 And Anab, and Eshtemoth, and Anim, 51 And Goshen, and Holon, and Giloh; eleven cities with their villages: 52 Arab, and Dumah, and Eshean, 53 And Janum, and Beth-tappuah, and Aphekah, 54 And Humtah, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, and Zior; nine cities with their villages: 55 Maon, Carmel, and Ziph, and Juttah, 56 And Jezreel, and Jokdeam, and Zanoah, 57 Cain, Gibeath, and Timnah; ten cities with their villages: 58 Halhul, Beth-zur, and Gedor, 59 And Maarath, and Beth-anoth, and Eltekon; six cities with their villages: 60 Kirjath-baal, which is Kirjath-yearim, and Rabbah; two cities with their villages: 61 In the wilderness, Beth-arabah, Middin, and Secacah, 62 And Nibshan, and the city of Salt, and En-gedi; six cities with their villages. 63 As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day.

We have here a list of the several cities that fell within the lot of the tribe of Judah, which are mentioned by name, that they might know their own, and both keep it and keep to it, and might neither through cowardice nor sloth lose the possession of what was their own.

1. The cities are here named, and numbered in several classes, which they then could account for the reason of better than we can now. Here are, 1. Some that are said to be the uttermost cities towards the coast of Edom, v. 21—32. Here are thirty-eight named, and yet said to be twenty-nine (v. 32), because nine of these were afterwards transferred to the lot of Simeon, and are reckoned as belonging to that, as appears by comparing ch. xix. 2, &c.; therefore those only are counted (though the rest are named which remained to Judah. 2. Others that are said to be in the valley (v. 33) are counted to be fourteen, yet fifteen are named; but it is probable that Gederah and Gederathaim were either two names or two parts of one and the same city. 3. Then sixteen are named without any head of distinction, v. 37—41, and nine more, v. 42—44. 4. Then the three Philistine cities, Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza, v. 45—47. 5. Cities in the moun-

*tains*, eleven in all (r. 48—51), nine more (v. 52—54), ten more (r. 55—57), six more (v. 58, 59), then two (r. 60), and six in the wilderness, a part of the country not so thick of inhabitants as some others were.

II. Now here, 1. We do not find Bethlehem, which was afterwards the city of David, and was ennobled by the birth of our Lord Jesus in it. But that city, which at the best was but *little among the thousands of Judah* (Mic. v. 2), except that it was thus dignified, was now so little as not to be accounted one of the cities, but perhaps was one of the villages not named. Christ came to give honour to the places he was related to, not to receive honour from them. 2. Jerusalem is said to continue in the hands of the Jebusites (r. 63), for the children of Judah could not drive them out, through their sluggishness, stupidity, and unbelief. Had they attempted it with vigour and resolution, we have reason to think God would not have been wanting to them to give them success; but they could not do it, because they would not. Jerusalem was afterwards to be the holy city, the royal city, the city of the great King, the brightest ornament of all the land of Israel. God had designed it should be so. It may therefore be justly looked upon as a punishment of their neglect to conquer other cities which God had given them that they were so long kept out of this. 3. Among the cities of Judah (in all 114) we meet with Libnah, which in Joram's days revolted, and probably set up for a free independent state (2 Kings viii. 22), and Lachish, where king Amaziah was slain (1 Kings xiv. 19); it led the dance in idolatry (Mic. i. 13); it was the *beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion*. Giloh, Ahithophel's town, is here mentioned, and Tekoa, of which the prophet Amos was, and near which Jehoshaphat obtained that glorious victory, 2 Chron. xx. 20, &c., and Maresha, where Asa was a conqueror. Many of the cities of this tribe occur in the history of David's troubles. Adullam, Ziph, Keilah, Maon, Engedi, Ziklag, here reckoned in this tribe, were places near which David had most of his haunts; for, though sometimes Saul drove him out from the inheritance of the Lord, yet he kept as close to it as he could. The wilderness of Judah he frequented much, and in it John Baptist preached, and there the kingdom of heaven commenced, Matt. iii. 1. The riches of this country no doubt answered Jacob's blessing of this tribe, that he should *wash his garments in wine*, Gen. xlix. 11. And, in general, *Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise*, not envy.

#### CHAP. XVI.

It is a pity that this and the following chapter should be separated, for both of them give us the lot of the children of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, who, next to Judah, were to have the post of honour, and therefore had the first and best portion in the northern part of Canaan, as Judah now had in the southern part. In this chapter we have, 1. A general account of the lot of these two tribes together, ver. 1—4. II. The borders of the lot of Ephraim in particular, ver. 5—10. That of Manasseh following in the next chapter.

AND the lot of the children of Joseph fell from Jordan by Jericho, unto the water of Jericho on the east, to the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout mount Beth-el, 2 And goeth out from Beth-el to Luz, and passeth along unto the borders of Archi to Ataroth, 3 And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer: and the goings out thereof are at the sea. 4 So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance.

Though Joseph was one of the younger sons of Jacob, yet he was his eldest by his most just and best beloved wife Rachel, was himself *his best beloved son*, and had been the greatest ornament and support of his family, kept it from perishing in a time of famine, and had been the *shepherd and stone of Israel*, and therefore his posterity were very much favoured by the lot. Their portion lay in the very heart of the land of Canaan. It extended from Jordan in the east (r. 1) to the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, in the west, so that it took up the whole breadth of Canaan from side to side; and no question the fruitfulness of the soil answered the blessings both of Jacob and Moses, Gen. xlix. 25, 26, and Deut. xxxiii. 13, &c. The portions allotted to Ephraim and Manasseh are not so particularly described as those of the other tribes; we have only the limits and boundaries of them, not the particular cities in them, as before we had the cities of Judah and afterwards those of the other tribes. For this no reason can be assigned, unless we may suppose that Joshua being himself of the children of Joseph they referred it to him alone to distribute among them the several cities that lay within their lot, and therefore did not bring in the names of their cities to the great council of their princes who sat upon this affair, by which means it came to pass that they were not inserted with the rest in the books.

5 And the border of the children of Ephraim according to their families was *thus*: even the border of their inheritance on the east side was Ataroth-addar, unto Beth-horon the upper; 6 And the border went out toward the sea to Michmethah on the north side; and the border went about eastward unto Taanath-shiloh, and passed by it on the east to Janohah; 7 And it went down from Janohah to Ataroth, and to Naarath, and came to

Jericho, and went out at Jordan. 8 The border went out from Tapuah westward unto the river Kanah; and the goings out thereof were at the sea. This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Ephraim by their families. 9 And the separate cities for the children of Ephraim were among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages. 10 And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute.

Here, 1. The border of the lot of Ephraim is set down, by which it was divided on the south from Benjamin and Dan, who lay between it and Judah, and on the north from Manasseh; for east and west it reached from Jordan to the great sea. The learned, who aim to be exact in drawing the line according to the directions here, find themselves very much at a loss, the description being short and intricate. The report of those who in these latter ages have travelled those countries will not serve to clear the difficulties, so vastly unlike is it now to what it was then; not only cities have been so destroyed as that no mark nor footstep of them remains, but brooks are dried up, rivers alter their courses, and even the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place, Job xiv. 18. Unless I could hope to solve the doubts that arise upon this draught of the border of Ephraim, it is to no purpose to mention them: no doubt it was then perfectly understood, so as that the first intention of recording it was effectually answered, which was to notify the ancient landmarks, which posterity must by no means remove. 2. Some separate cities are spoken of, that lay not within these borders, at least not if the line was drawn direct, but lay within the lot of Manasseh (v. 9), which might better be read, *and there were separate cities for the children of Ephraim among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh*, because it proved that Manasseh could spare them, and Ephraim had need of them, and it might be hoped that no inconvenience would arise from this mixture of these two tribes together, who were both the sons of Joseph, and should love as brethren. And by this it appears that though, when the tribes were numbered in the plains of Moab, Manasseh had got the start of Ephraim in number, for Manasseh was then 52,000, and Ephraim but 32,000 (Num. xxvi. 34, 37), yet by the time they were well settled in Canaan the hands were crossed again, and the blessing of Moses was verified, Deut. xxxiii. 17, *They are the ten thousands of Ephraim and they are the thou-*

sands of Manasseh. Families and kingdoms are diminished and increased, increased and diminished again, as God pleases. 3. A grand is put upon the Ephraimites, that they did not drive out the Canaanites from Gezer (v. 10), either through carelessness or cowardice, either for want of faith in the promise of God, that he would give them success if they would make a vigorous effort, or for want of zeal for the command of God, which obliged them utterly to drive out the Canaanites, and to make no peace with them. And, though they hoped to satisfy the law by putting them under tribute, yet (as Calvin thinks) this made the matter worse, for it shows that they spared them out of covetousness, that they might be profited by their labours, and by dealing with them for their tribute they were in danger of being infected with their idolatry; yet some think that, when they brought them under tribute, they obliged them to renounce their idols, and to observe the seven precepts of the sons of Noah; and I should think so, but that we find in the sequel of the story that the Israelites were so far from restraining idolatry in others that they soon fell into it themselves. Many famous places were within this lot of the tribe of Ephraim, though not mentioned here. In it were Ramah, Samuel's city (called in the New Testament *Arimathea*, of which Joseph was, that took care of our Saviour's burial), and Shiloh, where the tabernacle was first set up. Tirzah also, the royal city of Jeroboam and his successors, and Deborah's palm-tree, under which she judged Israel, were in this tribe. Samaria, built by Omri after the burning of the royal palace of Tirzah, was in this tribe, and was long the royal city of the kingdom of the ten tribes; not far from it were Shechem, and the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, and Sychar, near which was Jacob's well, where Christ talked with the woman of Samaria. We read much of Mount Ephraim in the story of the Judges, and of a city called *Ephraim*, it is probable in this tribe, to which Christ retired, John xi. 54. The whole kingdom of the ten tribes is often, in the prophets, especially in Hosea, called *Ephraim*.

## CHAP. XVII.

The half tribe of Manasseh comes next to be provided for; and here we have, I. The families of that tribe that were to be portioned, ver. 1—6. II. The country that fell to their lot, ver. 7—13. III. The joint request of the two tribes that descended from Joseph, for the enlargement of their lot, and Joshua's answer to that request, ver. 14—18.

**T**HERE was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh; for he was the firstborn of Joseph; *to wit*, for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead: because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan. 2 There was also a lot for the rest of the children of Manasseh by their families; for the child-

ren of Abiezer, and for the children of Helek, and for the children of Asriel, and for the children of Shechem, and for the children of Hephher, and for the children of Shemida: these *were* the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph by their families. 3 But Zelophehad, the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but daughters: and these *are* the names of his daughters, Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Mileah, and Tirzah. 4 And they came near before Eleazar the priest, and before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the princes, saying, The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren. Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father. 5 And there fell ten portions to Manasseh, beside the land of Gilead and Bashan, which *were* on the other side Jordan; 6 Because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons: and the rest of Manasseh's sons had the land of Gilead.

Manasseh was itself but one half of the tribe of Joseph, and yet was divided and subdivided. 1. It was divided into two parts, one already settled on the other side Jordan, consisting of those who were the posterity of Machir, *v. 1*. This Machir was born to Manasseh in Egypt; there he had signalized himself as a man of war, probably in the contests between the Ephraimites and the men of Gath, 1 Chron. vii. 21. His warlike disposition descended to his posterity, and therefore Moses gave them Gilead and Bashan, on the other side Jordan, of which before, *ch. xiii. 31*. It is here said that the lot came to Manasseh, *for he was the first-born of Joseph*. Bishop Patrick thinks it should be translated, *though he was the first-born of Joseph*, and then the meaning is plain, that the second lot was for Manasseh, because, though he was the first-born, yet Jacob had preferred Ephraim before him. See the names of those heads of the families that settled on the other side Jordan, 1 Chron. v. 24. 2. That part on this side Jordan was subdivided into ten families, *v. 5*. There were six sons of Gilead here named (*v. 2*), the same that are recorded Num. xxvi. 30—32, only that he who is there called *Jezeer* is here called *Abiezer*. Five of these sons had each of them their portion; the sixth, which was

Hephher, had his male line cut off in his son Zelophehad, who left daughters only, five in number, of whom we have often read, and these five had each of them a portion; though perhaps, they claiming under Hephher, all their five portions were but equal to one or the portions of the five sons. Or if Hephher had other sons besides Zelophehad, in whom the name of his family was kept up, their posterity married to the daughters of Zelophehad the elder brother, and in their right had these portions assigned them. See Num. xxxvi. 12. Here is, (1.) The claim which the daughters of Zelophehad made, grounded upon the command God gave to Moses concerning them, *v. 4*. They had themselves, when they were young, pleaded their own cause before Moses, and obtained the grant of an inheritance with their brethren, and now they would not lose the benefit of that grant for want of speaking to Joshua, but seasonably put in their demand themselves, as it should seem, and not their husbands for them. (2.) The assignment of their portions according to their claim. Joshua knew very well what God had ordered in their case, and did not object that they having not served in the wars of Canaan there was no reason why they should share in the possessions of Canaan, but readily gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father. And now they reaped the benefit of their own pious zeal and prudent forecast in this matter. Thus those who take care in the wilderness of this world to make sure to themselves a place in the inheritance of the saints in light will certainly have the comfort of it in the other world, while those that neglect it now will lose it for ever.

7 And the coast of Manasseh was from Asher to Michmethah, that *lieth* before Shechem; and the border went along on the right hand unto the inhabitants of En-tappuah. 8 Now Manasseh had the land of Tappuah: but Tappuah on the border of Manasseh belonged to the children of Ephraim; 9 And the coast descended unto the river Kanah, southward of the river: these cities of Ephraim *are* among the cities of Manasseh: the coast of Manasseh also *was* on the north side of the river, and the outgoings of it were at the sea: 10 Southward *it was* Ephraim's, and northward *it was* Manasseh's, and the sea is his border; and they met together in Asher on the north, and in Issachar on the east. 11 And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Beth-shean and



her towns, and Iblear, and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of En-dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, *even* three countries. 12 Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out *the inhabitants* of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. 13 Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out.

We have here a short account of the lot of this half tribe. It reached from Jordan on the east to the great sea on the west; on the south it lay all along contiguous to Ephraim, but on the north it abutted upon Asher and Issachar. Asher lay north-west, and Issachar north-east, which seems to be the meaning of that (v. 10), that they (that is, Manasseh and Ephraim, as related to it, both together making the tribe of Joseph) met in Asher on the north and Issachar on the east, for Ephraim itself reached not those tribes. Some things are particularly observed concerning this lot:—1. That there was great communication between this tribe and that of Ephraim. The city of Tappuah belonged to Ephraim, but the country adjoining to Manasseh (v. 8); there were likewise many cities of Ephraim that lay within the border of Manasseh (v. 9), of which before, *ch.* xvi. 9. 2. That Manasseh likewise had cities with their appurtenances in the tribes of Issachar and Asher (v. 11), God so ordering it, that though every tribe had its peculiar inheritance, which might not be alienated from it, yet they should thus intermix one with another, to keep up mutual acquaintance and correspondence among the tribes, and to give occasion for the doing of good offices one to another, as became those who, though of different tribes, were all one Israel, and were bound to love as brethren. 3. That they suffered the Canaanites to live among them, contrary to the command of God, serving their own ends by conniving at them, for they made them tributaries, v. 12, 13. The Ephraimites had done the same (*ch.* xvi. 10), and from them perhaps the Manassites learned it, and with their example excused themselves in it. The most remarkable person of this half tribe in after-time was Gidcon, whose great actions were done within this lot. He was of the family of Abiezer; Cesarea was in this lot, and Antipatris, famed in the latter ages of the Jewish state.

14 And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me *but* one lot and one

portion to inherit, seeing *I am* a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto? 15 And Joshua answered them, if thou *be* a great people, *then* get thee up to the wood *country*, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee. 16 And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, *both they* who *are* of Beth-shean and her towns, and *they* who *are* of the valley of Jezreel. 17 And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, *even* to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou *art* a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot *only*: 18 But the mountain shall be thine; for it *is* a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, *and* though they *be* strong.

Here, 1. The children of Joseph quarrel with their lot; if they had had any just cause to quarrel with it, we have reason to think Joshua would have relieved them, by adding to it, or altering it, which it does not appear he did. It is probable, because Joshua was himself of the tribe of Ephraim, they promised themselves that they should have some particular favour shown them, and should not be confined to the decision of the lot so closely as the other tribes; but Joshua makes them know that in the discharge of his office, as a public person, he had no more regard to his own tribe than to any other, but would administer impartially, without favour or affection, wherein he has left an excellent example to all in public trusts. It was a very competent provision that was made for them, as much, for aught that appears, as they were able to manage, and yet they call it in disdain *but one lot*, as if that which was assigned to them both was scarcely sufficient for one. The word for *complainers* (Jude 16) is *μεψιμοιροι*, blamers of their lot, like the children of Joseph, who would have that altered, the disposal whereof is from the Lord. Two things they suggest, to enforce their petition for an augmentation of their lot:—1. That they were very numerous, through the blessing of God upon them (v. 14): *I am a great people, for the Lord has blessed me*; and we have reason to hope that he that hath sent mouths will send meat. "*I am a great people, and in so small a lot shall not have*

room to thrive." Yet observe, when they speak thankfully of their present increase, they do not speak confidently of the continuance of it. "The Lord has blessed me hitherto, however he may see fit to deal with me for the future." The uncertainty of what may be must not make us unthankful for what has been and is done in kindness to us. 2. That a good part of that country which had now fallen to their lot was in the hands of the Canaanites, and that they were formidable enemies, who brought into the field of battle *chariots of iron* (c. 16), that is, chariots with long scythes fastened to the sides of them, or the axle-tree, which made great destruction of all that came in their way, mowing them down like corn. They urge that though they had a good portion assigned them, yet it was in bad hands, and they could not come to the possession of it, wishing to have their lot in those countries that were more thoroughly reduced than this was.

11. Joshua endeavours to reconcile them to their lot. He owns they were a *great people*, and being two tribes ought to have more than *one lot only* (c. 17), but tells them that what had fallen to their share would be a sufficient lot for them both, if they would but work and fight. They desired a lot in which they might indulge themselves in ease and luxury. "No," says Joshua, "you must not count upon that; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread is a sentence in force even in Canaan itself." He retorts their own argument, that they were a *great people*. "If so, you are the better able to help yourselves, and have the less reason to expect help from others. If thou hast many mouths to be filled, thou hast twice as many hands to be employed: earn, and then eat."

1. He bids them work for more (c. 15): "Get thee up to the wood-country, which is within thy own border, and let all hands be set to work to cut down the trees, rid the rough lands, and make them, with art and industry, good arable ground." Note, Many wish for larger possessions who do not cultivate and make the best of what they have, think they should have more talents given them who do not trade with those with which they are entrusted. Most people's poverty is the effect of their idleness; would they dig, they need not beg. 2. He bids them fight for more (c. 17, 18), when they pleaded that they could not come at the wood-lands he spoke of because in the valley between them and it there were Canaanites whom they durst not enter the lists with. "Never fear them," said Joshua; "thou hast God on thy side, and thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, if thou wilt set about it in good earnest, though they have iron chariots." We straiten ourselves by apprehending the difficulties in the way of our enlargement to be greater than really they are. What can be insuperable to faith and holy resolution?

## CHAP. XVIII.

In this chapter we have, I. The setting up of the tabernacle at Shiloh, ver. 1. II. The stirring up of the seven tribes that were yet unsettled to look after their lot, and the putting of them to a method for it, by Joshua, ver. 2-7. III. The distributing of the land into seven lots, by certain men employed for that purpose, ver. 8, 9. IV. The determining of these seven portions to the seven tribes yet unprovided for by lot, ver. 10. V. The particular lot of the tribe of Benjamin, the borders of it, ver. 11-20. And the cities contained in it, ver. 21-28. The other six tribes we shall find well provided for in the next chapter.

AND the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

In the midst of the story of the dividing of the land comes in this account of the setting up of the tabernacle, which had hitherto continued in its old place in the centre of their camp; but now that three of the four squadrons that used to surround it in the wilderness were broken and diminished, those of Judah, Ephraim, and Reuben, by the removal of those tribes to their respective possessions, and that of Dan only remained entire, it was time to think of removing the tabernacle itself into a city. Many a time the priests and Levites had taken it down, carried it, and set it up again in the wilderness, according to the directions given them (Num. iv. 5, &c.); but now they must do it for good and all, not one of the stakes thereof must any more be removed, nor any of the cords thereof broken, Isa. xxxiii. 20. Observe,

I. The place to which the tabernacle was removed, and in which it was set up. It was *Shiloh*, a city in the lot of Ephraim, but lying close upon the lot of Benjamin. Doubtless God himself did some way or other direct them to this place, for he had promised to *choose the place* where he would make *his name to dwell*, Deut. xii. 11. It is most probable God made known his mind in this matter by the judgment of Urim. This place was pitched upon, 1. Because it was in the heart of the country, nearer the centre than Jerusalem was, and therefore the more convenient for the meeting of all Israel there from the several parts of the country; it had been in the midst of their camp in the wilderness, and therefore must now be in the midst of their nation, as that which sanctified the whole, and was *the glory in the midst of them*. See Ps. xlii. 5. 2. Because it was in the lot of that tribe of which Joshua was, who was now their chief magistrate, and it would be both for his honour and convenience and for the advantage of the country to have it near him. The testimony of Israel and the thrones of judgment do well together, Ps. cxxii. 4, 5. 3. Some think there was an eye to the name of the place, *Shiloh* being the name by which the Messiah was known in dying Jacob's prophecy (Gen. xlix. 10), which prophecy, no doubt, was well known among the Jews; the setting up of the tabernacle in Shiloh

gave them a hint that in that Shiloh whom Jacob spoke of all the ordinances of this worldly sanctuary should have their accomplishment in a greater and more perfect tabernacle, Heb. ix. 1, 11. And Dr. Lightfoot thinks that the place where the tabernacle was set up was therefore called *Shiloh*, because of the peaceableness of the land at this time; as afterwards in Salem was his temple, which also signifies *peaceable*.

II. The solemn manner of doing it: *The whole congregation assembled together* to attend the solemnity, to do honour to the ark of God, as the token of his presence, and to bid it welcome to its settlement. Every Israelite was interested in it, and therefore all testified their joy and satisfaction upon this occasion. See 2 Sam. vi. 15. It is probable those tribes that were yet encamped when the tabernacle was removed to Shiloh decamped from Gilgal and pitched about Shiloh, for every true Israelite will desire to fix where God's tabernacle fixes. Mention is made, on this occasion, of the land being subdued before them, to intimate that the country, hereabouts at least, being thoroughly reduced, they met with no opposition, nor were they apprehensive of any danger, but thought it time to make this grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness to them in the constant series of successes with which he had blessed them. It was a good presage of a comfortable settlement to themselves in Canaan, when their first care was to see the ark well settled as soon as they had a safe place ready to settle it in. Here the ark continued about 300 years, till the sins of Eli's house forfeited the ark, lost it and ruined Shiloh, and its ruins were long after made use of as warnings to Jerusalem. *Go, see what I did to Shiloh*, Jer. vii. 12; Ps. lxxviii. 60.

2 And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance. 3 And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long *are* ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you? 4 Give out from among you three men for *each* tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and they shall come *again* to me. 5 And they shall divide it into seven parts: Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north. 6 Ye shall therefore describe the land *into* seven parts, and bring *the description* hither to me, that I may cast lots for you

here before the LORD our God. 7 But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasse, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them. 8 And the men arose, and went away: and Joshua charged them that went to describe the land, saying, Go and walk through the land; and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the LORD in Shiloh. 9 And the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities into seven parts in a book, and came *again* to Joshua to the host at Shiloh. 10 And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions.

Here, 1. Joshua reproves those tribes which were yet unsettled that they did not bestir themselves to gain a settlement in the land which God had given them. Seven tribes were yet unprovided for, though sure of an inheritance, yet uncertain where it should be, and it seems in no great care about it, v. 2. And with them Joshua reasons (v. 3): *How long are you slack?* 1. They were too well pleased with their present condition, liked well enough to live in a body together, the more the merrier, and, like the Babel-builders, had no mind to be scattered abroad and break good company. The spoil of the cities they had taken served them to live plentifully upon for the present, and they banished the thoughts of time to come. Perhaps the tribes of Judah and Joseph, who had already received their inheritance in the countries next adjoining, were generous in entertaining their brethren who were yet unprovided for, so that they went from one good house to another among their friends, with which, instead of grudging that they were postponed, they were so well pleased that they cared not for going to houses of their own. 2. They were slothful and dilatory. It may be they wished the thing done, but had not spirit to stir in it, or move towards the doing of it, though it was so much for their own advantage; like the sluggard, that *hides his hand in his bosom, and it grieves him to bring it to his mouth again*. The countries that remained to be divided lay at a distance, and some parts of them in the hands of the Canaanites. If they go to take possession of them, the cities must be rebuilt or re-

paired, they must drive their flocks and herds a great way, and carry their wives and children to strange places, and this will not be done without care and pains, and breaking through some hardships; thus *he that observes the wind shall not sow, and he that regards the clouds shall not reap*, Eccl. xi. 4. Note, Many are diverted from real duties, and debarred from real comforts, by seeming difficulties. God by his grace has given us a title to a good land, the heavenly Canaan, but we are *slack to take possession*; we enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven, as we might by setting our affections on things above and having our conversation there. How long shall it be thus with us? How long shall we thus stand in our own light, and *forsake our own mercies* for lying vanities? Joshua was sensible of the inconveniences of this delay, that, while they neglected to take possession of the land that was conquered, the Canaanites were recovering strength and spirit, and fortifying themselves in the places that were yet in their hands, which would make the total expulsion of them the more difficult. They would lose their advantages by not following their blow; and therefore, *as an eagle stirreth up her nest*, so Joshua stirs them up to take possession of their lot. He is ready to do his part, if they will but do theirs.

II. He puts them in a way to settle themselves.

1. The land that remained must be surveyed, an account taken of the cities, and the territories belonging to them, v. 4. These must be divided into seven equal parts, as near as they could guess at their true value, which they must have an eye to, and not merely to the number of the cities and extent of the country. Judah is fixed on the south and Joseph on the north of Shiloh, to protect the tabernacle (v. 5), and therefore they need not describe their country, but those countries only that were yet undisposed of. He gives a reason (v. 7) why they must divide it into seven parts only, because the Levites were to have no temporal estate (as we say), but their benefices only, which were entailed upon their families: *The priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance*, and a very honourable, comfortable, plentiful inheritance it was. Gad and Reuben, with half of the tribe of Manasseh, were already fixed, and needed not to have any further care taken of them. Now, (1.) The surveyors were three men out of each of the seven tribes that were to be provided for (v. 4), one-and-twenty in all, who perhaps for greater expedition, because they had already lost time, divided themselves into three companies, one of each tribe in each company, and took each their district to survey. The matter was thus referred equally, that there might be neither any partiality used in making up the seven lots, nor

any shadow of suspicion given, but all might be satisfied that they had right done them.

(2.) The survey was accordingly made, and brought in to Joshua, v. 8, 9. Josephus says it was seven months in the doing. And we must in it observe, [1.] The faith and courage of the persons employed: abundance of Canaanites remained in the land, and all raging against Israel, *as a bear robbed of her whelps*; the business of these surveyors would soon be known, and what could they expect but to be way-laid, and have their brains knocked out by the fierce observers? But in obedience to Joshua's command, and in dependence upon God's power, they thus put their lives in their hands to serve their country. [2.] The good providence of God in protecting them from the many deaths they were exposed to, and bringing them all safely again to the host at Shiloh. When we are in the way of our duty we are under the special protection of the Almighty.

2. When it was surveyed, and reduced to seven lots, then Joshua would, by appeal to God, and direction from him, determine which of these lots should belong to each tribe (v. 6): *That I may cast lots for you here* at the tabernacle (because it was a sacred transaction) *before the Lord our God*, to whom each tribe must have an eye, with thankfulness for the conveniences and submission to the inconveniences of their allotment. What we have in the world we must acknowledge God's property in, and dispose of it as before him, with justice, and charity, and dependence upon Providence. The heavenly Canaan is described to us in a book, the book of the scriptures, and there are in it mansions and portions sufficient for all God's spiritual Israel. Christ is our Joshua that divides it to us. On him we must attend, and to him we must apply for an inheritance with the saints in light. See John xvii. 2, 3.

11 And the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families: and the coast of their lot came forth between the children of Judah and the children of Joseph. 12 And their border on the north side was from Jordan; and the border went up to the side of Jericho on the north side, and went up through the mountains westward; and the goings out thereof were at the wilderness of Beth-aven. 13 And the border went over from thence toward Luz, to the side of Luz, which is Beth-el, southward; and the border descended to Ataroth-adar, near the hill that lieth on the south side of the nether Beth-

horon. 14 And the border was drawn *thence*, and compassed the corner of the sea southward, from the hill that *lieth* before Beth-horon southward; and the goings out thereof were at Kirjath-baal, which *is* Kirjath-jearim, a city of the children of Judah: this *was* the west quarter. 15 And the south quarter *was* from the end of Kirjath-jearim, and the border went out on the west, and went out to the well of waters of Nephtoah: 16 And the border came down to the end of the mountain that *lieth* before the valley of the son of Hinnom, *and* which *is* in the valley of the giants on the north, and descended to the valley of Hinnom, to the side of Jebusi on the south, and descended to En-rogel, 17 And was drawn from the north, and went forth to En-shemesh, and went forth toward Geliloth, which *is* over against the going up of Adummim, and descended to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben, 18 And passed along toward the side over against Arabah northward, and went down unto Arabah: 19 And the border passed along to the side of Beth-hoglah northward: and the outgoings of the border were at the north bay of the salt sea at the south end of Jordan: this *was* the south coast. 20 And Jordan was the border of it on the east side. This *was* the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, by the coasts thereof round about, according to their families. 21 Now the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho, and Beth-hoglah, and the valley of Keziz, 22 And Beth-arabah, and Zemaraim, and Beth-el, 23 And Avim, and Parah, and Ophrah, 24 And Chephar-hammouai, and Ophni, and Gaba; twelve cities with their villages. 25 Gibeon, and Ramah, and Beeroth, 26 And Mizpeh, and Chephirah, and Mozah, 27 And Rekem, and Irpeel, and Taralah, 28 And Zelah, Eleph, and Jebusi, which *is* Jerusalem, Gibeath, *and* Kirjath; fourteen cities with their villages. This *is* the inhe-

ritance of the children of Benjamin according to their families.

We have here the lot of the tribe of Benjamin, which Providence cast next to Joseph on the one hand, because Benjamin was own and only brother to Joseph, and was little Benjamin (Ps. lxxviii. 27), that needed the protection of great Joseph, and yet had a better protector, for *the Lord shall cover him all the day long*, Deut. xxxiii. 12. And it was next to Judah on the other hand, that this tribe might hereafter unite with Judah in an adherence to the throne of David and the temple at Jerusalem. Here we have, 1. The exact borders and limits of this tribe, which we need not be exact in the explication of. As it had Judah on the south and Joseph on the north, so it had Jordan on the east and Dan on the west. The western border is said to *compass the corner of the sea southward* (v. 14), whereas no part of the lot of this tribe came near to the great sea. Bishop Patrick thinks the meaning is that it ran along in a parallel line to the great sea, though at a distance. Dr. Fuller suggests that since it is not called *the great sea*, but only *the sea*, which often signifies any lake or mere, it may be meant of the pool of Gibeon, which may be called a *corner* or *canton* of the sea; it is called the *great waters of Gibeon* (Jer. xli. 12), and it is compassed by the western border of this tribe. 2. The particular cities in this tribe, not all, but the most considerable. Twenty-six are here named. Jericho is put first, though dismantled, and forbidden to be rebuilt as a city with gates and walls, because it might be built and inhabited as a country village, and so was not useless to this tribe. Gilgal, where Israel first encamped when Saul was made king (1 Sam. xi. 15), was in this tribe. It was afterwards a very profane place. Hos. ix. 15, *All their wickedness is in Gilgal*. Beth-el was in this tribe, a famous place. Though Benjamin adhered to the house of David, yet Beth-el, it seems, was in the possession of the house of Joseph (Judg. i. 23—25), and there Jeroboam set up one of his calves. In this tribe was Gibeon, where the altar was in the beginning of Solomon's time, 2 Chron. i. 3. Gibeah likewise, that infamous place where the Levite's concubine was abused. Mizpeh, and near it Samuel's Ebenezer, and also Anathoth, Jeremiah's city, were in this tribe, as was the northern part of Jerusalem. Paul was the honour of this tribe (Rom. xi. 1; Phil. iii. 5); but where his land lay we know not: he sought the better country.

## CHAP. XIX.

In the description of the lots of Judah and Benjamin we have an account both of the borders that surrounded them and of the cities contained in them. In that of Ephraim and Manasseh we have the borders, but not the cities; in this chapter Simeon and Dan are described by their cities only, and not their borders, because they lay very much within Judah, especially the former; the rest have both their borders described and their cities named, especially frontiers. Here is, I. The lot of Simeon, ver. 1—9. II. Of Zebulun, ver. 10—16. III. Of Issachar, ver. 17—23. IV. Of Asher, ver. 24—31. V. Of Naphtali, ver. 32—39. VI. Of Dan,

ver. 40—48. Lastly, The inheritance assigned to Joshua himself and his own family, ver. 49—51.

AND the second lot came forth to Simeon, *even* for the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families: and their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah. 2 And they had in their inheritance Beer-sheba, and Sheba, and Moladah, 3 And Hazarshual, and Balah, and Azem, 4 And Eltolad, and Bethul, and Hormah, 5 And Ziklag, and Beth-marcaboth, and Hazar-susah, 6 And Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhin; thirteen cities and their villages: 7 Ain, Remmon, and Ether, and Ashan; four cities and their villages: 8 And all the villages that *were* round about these cities to Baalath-beer, Ramath of the south. This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families. 9 Out of the portion of the children of Judah *was* the inheritance of the children of Simeon: for the part of the children of Judah was too much for them: therefore the children of Simeon had their inheritance within the inheritance of them.

Simeon's lot was drawn after Judah's, Joseph's, and Benjamin's, because Jacob had put that tribe under disgrace; yet it is put before the two younger sons of Leah and the three sons of the handmaids. Not one person of note, neither judge nor prophet, was of this tribe, that we know of.

I. The situation of their lot was within that of Judah (v. 1) and was taken from it, v. 9. It seems, those that first surveyed the land thought it larger than it was, and that it would have held out to give every tribe in proportion as large a share as they had carved out for Judah; but, upon a more strict enquiry, it was found that it would not reach (v. 9): *The part of the children of Judah was too much for them*, more than they needed, and more, as it proved, than fell to their share. Yet God did not by the lot lessen it, but left it to their prudence and care afterwards to discover and rectify the mistake, which when they did, 1. The men of Judah did not oppose the taking away of the cities again, which by the first distribution fell within their border, when they were convinced that they had more than their proportion. In all such cases errors must be excepted and a review admitted if there be occasion. Though, in strictness, what fell to their lot was their right against all the world, yet they would not insist upon it

when it appeared that another tribe would want what they had to spare. Note, We must look on the things of others, and not on our own only. The abundance of some must supply the wants of others, that there may be somewhat of an equality, for which there may be equity where there is not law. 2. That which was thus taken off from Judah to be put into a new lot Providence directed to the tribe of Simeon, that Jacob's prophecy concerning this tribe might be fulfilled, *I will divide them in Jacob*. The cities of Simeon were scattered in Judah, with which tribe they were surrounded, except on that side towards the sea. This brought them into a confederacy with the tribe of Judah (Judg. i. 3), and afterwards was a happy occasion of the adherence of many of this tribe to the house of David, at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes to Jeroboam. 2 Chron. xv. 9, *out of Simeon they fell to Asa in abundance*. It is good being in a good neighbourhood.

II. The cities within their lot are here named. Beersheba, or Sheba, for these names seem to refer to the same place, is put first. Ziklag, which we read of in David's story, is one of them. What course they took to enlarge their borders and make room for themselves we find 1 Chron. iv. 39, &c.

10 And the third lot came up for the children of Zebulun according to their families: and the border of their inheritance was unto Sarid: 11 And their border went up toward the sea, and Maralah, and reached to Dabbasheth, and reached to the river that is before Jokneam; 12 And turned from Sarid eastward toward the sun-rising unto the border of Chisloth-tabor, and then goeth out to Daberrath, and goeth up to Japhia, 13 And from thence passeth on along on the east to Gittah-hepher, to Ittahkazin, and goeth out to Remmon-methoar to Neah; 14 And the border compasseth it on the north side to Hannathon: and the outgoings thereof are in the valley of Jiphthah-el: 15 And Kattath, and Nahallal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Beth-lehem: twelve cities with their villages. 16 This is the inheritance of the children of Zebulun according to their families, these cities with their villages.

This is the lot of Zebulun, who, though born of Leah after Issachar, yet was blessed by Jacob and Moses before him; and therefore it was so ordered that his lot was drawn before that of Issachar, north of which it

lay, and south of Asher. 1. The lot of this tribe was washed by the great sea on the west, and by the sea of Tiberias on the east, answering Jacob's prophecy (Gen. xlix. 13), *Zebulun shall be a haven of ships*, trading ships on the great sea and fishing ships on the sea of Galilee. 2. Though there were some places in this tribe which were made famous in the Old Testament, especially *Mount Carmel*, on which the famous trial was between God and Baal in Elijah's time, yet it was made much more illustrious in the New Testament; for within the lot of this tribe was Nazareth, where our blessed Saviour spent so much of his time on earth, and from which he was called *Jesus of Nazareth*, and *Mount Tabor* on which he was transfigured, and that coast of the sea of Galilee on which Christ preached so many sermons and wrought so many miracles.

17 *And* the fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families. 18 *And* their border was toward Jezreel, and Chesulloth, and Shunem, 19 *And* Haphraim, and Shihon, and Anaharath, 20 *And* Rabbith, and Kishion, and Abez, 21 *And* Remeth, and En-gannim, and Eu-haddah, and Beth-pazzez; 22 *And* the coast reacheth to Tabor, and Shahazimah, and Beth-shemesh; and the out-goings of their border were at Jordan: sixteen cities with their villages. 23 *This is* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Issachar according to their families, the cities and their villages.

The lot of Issachar ran from Jordan in the east to the great sea in the west, Manasseh on the south, and Zebulun on the north. A numerous tribe, Num. xxvi. 25. Tola, one of the judges, was of this tribe, Judg. x. 1. So was Baasha, one of the kings of Israel, 1 Kings xv. 27. The most considerable places in this tribe were, 1. Jezreel, in which was Ahab's palace, and near it Naboth's vineyard. 2. Shunem, where lived the good Shunamite that entertained Elisha. 3. The river Kishon, on the banks of which, in this tribe, Sisera was beaten by Deborah and Barak. 4. The mountains of Gilboa, on which Saul and Jonathan were slain, which were not far from Endor, where Saul consulted the witch. 5. The valley of Megiddo, where Josiah was slain near Hadad-rimmon, 2 Kings xxiii. 29; Zech. xii. 11.

24 *And* the fifth lot came out for the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families. 25 *And* their border was Helkath, and Hali,

and Beten, and Achshaph, 26 *And* Alammelech, and Amad, and Misheal; and reacheth to Carmel westward, and to Shihor-libnath; 27 *And* turneth toward the sunrising to Beth-dagon, and reacheth to Zebulun, and to the valley of Jiphthah-el toward the north side of Beth-emek, and Neiel, and goeth out to Cabul on the left hand, 28 *And* Hebron, and Rehob, and Hammon, and Kanah, *even* unto great Zidon; 29 *And then* the coast turneth to Ramah, and to the strong city Tyre; and the coast turneth to Hosah; and the outgoings thereof are at the sea from the coast to Achzib: 30 Ummah also, and Aphek, and Rehob: twenty and two cities with their villages. 31 *This is* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families, these cities with their villages.

The lot of Asher lay upon the coast of the great sea. We read not of any famous person of this tribe but Anna the prophetess, who was a constant resident in the temple at the time of our Saviour's birth, Luke ii. 36. Nor were there many famous places in this tribe. Aphek (mentioned v. 30) was the place near which Benhadad was beaten by Ahab, 1 Kings xx. 30. But close adjoining to this tribe were the celebrated sea-port towns of Tyre and Sidon, which we read so much of. Tyre is called here *that strong city* (v. 29), but bishop Patrick thinks it was not the same Tyre that we read of afterwards, for that was built on an island; this old strong city was on the continent. And it is conjectured by some that into these two strong-holds, Sidon and Tzor, or Tyre, many of the people of Canaan fled and took shelter when Joshua invaded them.

32 The sixth lot came out to the children of Naphtali, *even* for the children of Naphtali according to their families. 33 *And* their coast was from Heleph, from Allon to Zaanannim, and Adami, Nekeb, and Jabneel, unto Lakum; and the outgoings thereof were at Jordan: 34 *And then* the coast turneth westward to Azuoth-tabor, and goeth out from thence to Hukkok, and reacheth to Zebulun on the south side, and reacheth to Asher on the west side, and to Judah upon Jordan toward the sunrising. 35 *And* the fenced cities are Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath,

Rakkath, and Chinnereth, 36 And Adamah, and Ramah, and Hazor, 37 And Kedesh, and Edrei, and En-hazor, 38 And Iron, and Migdal-el, Horem, and Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh; nineteen cities with their villages. 39 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Naphtali according to their families, the cities and their villages.

Naphtali lay furthest north of all the tribes, bordering on Mount Libanus. The city of Leshem, or Laish, lay on the utmost edge of it to the north, and therefore when the Danites had made themselves masters of it, and called it *Dan*, the length of Canaan from north to south was reckoned from Dan to Beersheba. It had Zehulun on the south, Asher on the west, and Judah upon Jordan, probably a city of that name, and so distinguished from the tribe of Judah on the east. It was in the lot of this tribe, near the waters of Merom, that Joshua fought and routed Jabin, *ch. xi. 1. &c.* In this tribe stood Capernaum and Bethsaida, on the north end of the sea of Tiberias, in which Christ did so many mighty works; and the mountain (as is supposed) on which Christ preached, *Matt. v. 1.*

40 And the seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families. 41 And the coast of their inheritance was Zorah, and Eshtaol, and Ir-shemesh, 42 And Shaalabbin, and Ajalon, and Jethlah, 43 And Elon, and Thimnathah, and Ekron, 44 And Eltekeh, and Gibbethon, and Baaiath, 45 And Jehud, and Bene-berak, and Gath-rimmon, 46 And Me-jarkon, and Rakkon, with the border before Japho. 47 And the coast of the children of Dan went out *too little* for them: therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father. 48 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families, these cities with their villages.

Dan, though commander of one of the four squadrons of the camp of Israel, in the wilderness, that which brought up the rear, yet was last provided for in Canaan, and his lot fell in the southern part of Canaan, between Judah on the east and the land of

the Philistines on the west, Ephraim on the north and Simeon on the south. Providence ordered this numerous and powerful tribe into a post of danger, as best able to deal with those vexatious neighbours the Philistines, and so it was found in Samson. Here is an account, 1 Of what fell to this tribe by lot, Zorah, and Eshtaol, and the camp of Dan thereabouts, of which we read in the story of Samson. And near there was the valley of Eshcol, whence the spies brought the famous bunch of grapes. Japho, or Joppa, was in this lot. 2. Of what they got by their own industry and valour, which is mentioned here (*v. 47*), but related at large, *Judg. xviii. 7, &c.*

49 When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them: 50 According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked, *even* Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein. 51 These *are* the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, divided for an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. So they made an end of dividing the country.

Before this account of the dividing of the land is solemnly closed up, in the last verse, which intimates that the thing was done to the satisfaction of all, here is an account of the particular inheritance assigned to Joshua. 1. He was last served, though the eldest and greatest man of all Israel, and who, having commanded in the conquest of Canaan, might have demanded the first settlement in it for himself and his family. But he would make it to appear that in all he did he sought the good of his country, and not any private interest of his own. He was content to be unfixed till he saw them all settled; and herein is a great example to all in public places to prefer the common welfare before their particular satisfaction. Let the public be first served. 2. He had his lot *according to the word of the Lord*. It is probable that, when God by Moses told Caleb what inheritance he should have (*ch. xiv. 9*), he gave the like promise to Joshua, which he had an eye to in making his election: this made his portion doubly pleasant, that he had it, not as the rest by common providence, but by special promise. 3. He chose it in Mount Ephraim, which belonged to his own tribe, with which he thereby put himself in common, when he might by prerogative



have chosen his inheritance in some other tribe, as suppose that of Judah, and thereby have distinguished himself from them. Let no man's preferment or honour make him ashamed of his family or country, or estrange him from it. The tabernacle was set up in the lot of Ephraim, and Joshua would forecast not to be far from that. 4. The *children of Israel* are said to *give it to him* (v. 49), which bespeaks his humility, that he would not take it to himself without the people's consent and approbation, as if he would thereby own himself, though *major singulis—greater than any one, yet minor universis—less than the whole assemblage*, and would hold even the estate of his family, under God, by the grant of the people. 5. It was a city that must be built before it was fit to be dwelt in. While others dwelt in houses which they built not, Joshua must erect for himself (that he might be a pattern of industry and contentment with mean things) such buildings as he could hastily run up, without curiosity or magnificence. Our Lord Jesus thus came and dwelt among us, not in pomp but poverty, providing rest for us, yet himself not having where to lay his head. *Even Christ pleased not himself.*

## CHAP. XX.

This short chapter is concerning the cities of refuge, which we often read of in the writings of Moses, but this is the last time that we find mention of them, for now that matter was thoroughly settled. Here is, 1. The law God gave concerning them, ver. 1—6. 11. The people's designation of the particular cities for that use, ver. 7—9. And this remedial law was a figure of good things to come.

**T**HE LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, 2 Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: 3 That the slayer that killeth *any* person unawares *and* unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4 And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5 And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not before time. 6 And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, *and* until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and un-

to his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.

Many things were by the law of Moses ordered to be done when they came to Canaan and this among the rest, the appointing of sanctuaries for the protecting of those that were guilty of casual murder, which was a privilege to all Israel, since no man could be sure but some time or other it might be his own case; and it was for the interest of the land that the blood of an innocent person, whose hand only was guilty but not his heart, should not be shed, no, not by the avenger of blood: of this law, which was so much for their advantage, God here reminds them, that they might remind themselves of the other laws he had given them, which concerned his honour. 1. Orders are given for the appointing of these cities (v. 2), and very seasonably at this time when the land was newly surveyed, and so they were the better able to divide the coasts of it into three parts, as God had directed them, in order to the more convenient situation of these cities of refuge, Deut. xix. 3. Yet it is probable that it was not done till after the Levites had their portion assigned them in the next chapter, because the cities of refuge were all to be Levites' cities. As soon as ever God had given them cities of rest, he bade them appoint cities of refuge, to which none of them knew but they might be glad to escape. Thus God provided, not only for their ease at all times, but for their safety in times of danger, and such times we must expect and prepare for in this world. And it intimates what God's spiritual Israel have and shall have, in Christ and heaven, not only rest to repose themselves in, but refuge to secure themselves in. And we cannot think these cities of refuge would have been so often and so much spoken of in the law of Moses, and have had so much care taken about them (when the intention of them might have been effectually answered, as it is in our law, by authorizing the courts of judgment to protect and acquit the manslayer in all those cases wherein he was to have privilege of sanctuary), if they were not designed to typify the relief which the gospel provides for poor penitent sinners, and their protection from the curse of the law and the wrath of God, in our Lord Jesus, to whom believers flee for refuge (Heb. vi. 18), and in whom they are found (Phil. iii. 9) as in a sanctuary, where they are privileged from arrests, and *there is now no condemnation to them*, Rom. viii. 1. 2. Instructions are given for the using of these cities. The laws in this matter we had before, Num. xxxv. 10, &c., where they were opened at large. (1.) It is supposed that a man might possibly kill a person, it might be his own child or dearest friend, unawares and unwittingly (v. 3), not only whom he hated not, but whom he truly loved beforetime (v. 5).

for the way of man is not in himself. What reason have we to thank God who has kept us both from slaying and from being slain by accident! In this case, it is supposed that the relations of the person slain would demand the life of the slayer, as a satisfaction to that ancient law that *whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*. (2.) It is provided that if upon trial it appeared that the murder was done purely by accident, and not by design, either upon an old grudge or a sudden passion, then the slayer should be sheltered from the avenger of blood in any one of these cities, *v. 4-6*. By this law he was entitled to a dwelling in that city, was taken into the care of the government of it, but was confined to it, as a prisoner at large; only, if he survived the high priest, then, and not till then, he might return to his own city. And the Jews say, "If he died before the high priest in the city of his refuge and exile, and was buried there, yet, at the death of the high priest, his bones should be removed with respect to the place of his fathers' sepulchres."

7 And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. 8 And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

We have here the nomination of the cities of refuge in the land of Canaan, which was made by the advice and authority of Joshua and the princes (*v. 7*); and upon occasion of the mention of this is repeated the nomination of the other three in the lot of the other two tribes and a half, which was made by Moses (*Deut. iv. 43*), but (as bishop Patrick thinks) they had not the privilege till now.

1. They are said to *sanctify* these cities, that is the original word for *appointed*, *v. 7*. Not that any ceremony was used to signify the consecration of them, only they did by a public act of court solemnly declare them cities of refuge, and as such sacred to the honour of God, as the protector of exposed innocency. If they were sanctuaries, it was proper to say they were *sanctified*. Christ

our refuge, was sanctified by his Father; may, for our sakes he sanctified himself, John xvii. 19. 2. These cities (as those also on the other side Jordan) stood in the three several parts of the country, so conveniently that a man might (they say) in half a day reach some one of them from any corner of the country. Kedesh was in Naphtali, the most northern tribe, Hebron in Judah, the most southern, and Shechem in Ephraim, which lay in the middle, about equally distant from the other two. God is a refuge at hand. 3. They were all Levites' cities, which put an honour upon God's tribe, making them judges in those cases wherein divine Providence was so nearly concerned, and protectors to oppressed innocency. It was also a kindness to the poor refugee, that when he might not go up to the house of the Lord, nor tread his courts, yet he had the servants of God's house with him, to instruct him, and pray for him, and help to make up the want of public ordinances. If he must be confined, it shall be to a Levite-city, where he may, if he will, improve his time. 4. These cities were upon hills to be seen afar off, for a city on a hill cannot be hid; and this would both direct and encourage the poor distressed man that was making that way; and, though therefore his way at last was up-hill, yet this would comfort him, that he would be in his place of safety quickly, and if he could but get into the suburbs of the city he was well enough off. 5. Some observe a significancy in the names of these cities with application to Christ our refuge. I delight not in quibbling upon names, yet am willing to take notice of these. *Kedesh* signifies *holy*, and our refuge is the holy Jesus. *Shechem*, a *shoulder*, and the government is upon his shoulder. *Hebron*, *fellowship*, and believers are called into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. *Bezer*, a *fortification*, for he is a strong-hold to all those that trust in him. *Ramoth*, *high* or *exalted*, for him hath God exalted with his own right hand. *Golan*, *joy* or *exultation*, for in him all the saints are justified, and shall glory. *Lastly*, Besides all these, the horns of the altar, wherever it was, were a refuge to those who took hold of them, if the crime were such as that sanctuary allowed. This is implied in that law (*Exod. xxi. 14*), that a wilful murderer shall be taken from God's altar to be put to death. And we find the altar used for this purpose, *1 Kings i. 50*; *ii. 28*. Christ is our altar, who not only *sanctifies the gift*, but protects the giver.

#### CHAP. XXI.

\* It had been often said that the tribe of Levi should have "no inheritance with their brethren," no particular part of the country assigned them, as the other tribes had, no, not the country about Shiloh, which one might have expected to be appropriated to them as the lands of the church; but, though they were not thus cast into a country by themselves, it appears, by the provision made for them in this chapter, that they were no losers, but the rest of the tribes were very much gainers, by their being dispersed. We have here, 1. The motion they made to have their cities assigned them, according to God's appointment, *ver. 1, 5, 11*. The nomination of the cities accordingly out of the several

tribes, and the distribution of them to the respective families of this tribe, ver. 3—5. III. A catalogue of the cities, forty-eight in all, ver. 9—12. IV. A receipt entered in full of all that God had promised to his people Israel, ver. 43—45.

**T**HEN came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel; 2 And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle. 3 And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs. 4 And the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites: and the children of Aaron the priest, *which were* of the Levites, had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities. 5 And the rest of the children of Kohath *had* by lot out of the families of the tribe of Ephraim, and out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh, ten cities. 6 And the children of Gershon *had* by lot out of the families of the tribe of Issachar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities. 7 The children of Merari by their families *had* out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. 8 And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Here is, I. The Levites' petition presented to this general convention of the states, now sitting at Shiloh, *v.* 1, 2. Observe, 1 They had not their lot assigned them till they made their claim. There is an inheritance provided for all the saints, that royal priesthood, but then they must petition for it. *Ask, and it shall be given you.* Joshua had quickened the rest of the tribes who were slack to put in their claims, but the Levites, it may be supposed, knew their duty and interest better than the rest, and were therefore forward in this matter, when it came to their turn, without being called upon. They build their claim upon a very good foundation, not their own merits nor services, but the divine pre-

cept: "The Lord commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities, commanded you to grant them, which implied a command to us to ask them." Note, The maintenance of ministers is not an arbitrary thing, left purely to the good-will of the people, who may let them starve if they please; no, as the God of Israel commanded that the Levites should be well provided for, so has the Lord Jesus, the King of the Christian church, ordained, and a perpetual ordinance it is, that *those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel* (1 Cor. ix. 14), and should live comfortably. 2. They did not make their claim till all the rest of the tribes were provided for, and then they did it immediately. There was some reason for it; every tribe must first know their own, else they would not know what they gave the Levites, and so it could not be such a reasonable service as it ought to be. But it is also an instance of their humility, modesty, and patience (and Levites should be examples of these and other virtues), that they were willing to be served last, and they fared never the worse for it. Let not God's ministers complain if at any time they find themselves postponed in men's thoughts and cares, but let them make sure of the favour of God and the honour that comes from him, and then they may well enough afford to bear the slights and neglects of men.

II. The Levites' petition granted immediately, without any dispute, the princes of Israel being perhaps ashamed that they needed to be called upon in this matter, and that the motion had not been made among themselves for the settling of the Levites. 1. The children of Israel are said to give the cities for the Levites. God had appointed how many they should be in all, forty-eight. It is probable that Joshua and the princes, upon consideration of the extent and value of the lot of each tribe as it was laid before them, had appointed how many cities should be taken out of each; and then the fathers of the several tribes themselves agreed which they should be, and therefore are said to give them, as an offering, to the Lord; so God had appointed. Num. xxxv. 8, *Every one shall give of his cities to the Levites.* Here God tried their generosity, and it was found to praise and honour, for it appears by the following catalogue that the cities they gave to the Levites were generally some of the best and most considerable in each tribe. And it is probable that they had an eye to the situation of them, taking care they should be so dispersed as that no part of the country should be too far distant from a Levites' city. 2. They gave them *at the commandment of the Lord*, that is, with an eye to the command and in obedience to it, which was it that sanctified the grant. They gave the number that God commanded, and it was well this matter was settled, that the Levites might not ask more nor the Israelites offer less. They gave them also with their suburbs,

or glebe-lands, belonging to them, so many cubits by measure from the walls of the city, as God had commanded (Num. xxxv. 4, 5), and did not go about to cut them short. 3. When the forty-eight cities were pitched upon, they were divided into four lots, as they lay next together, and then by lot were determined to the four several families of the tribe of Levi. When the Israelites had surrendered the cities into the hand of God, he would himself have the distributing of them among his servants. (1.) The family of Aaron, who were the only priests, had for their share the thirteen cities that were given by the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, v. 4. God in wisdom ordered it thus, that though Jerusalem itself was not one of their cities, it being as yet in the possession of the Jebusites (and those generous tribes would not mock the Levites, who had another warfare to mind, with a city that must be recovered by the sword before it could be enjoyed), yet the cities that fell to their lot were those which lay next to Jerusalem, because that was to be, in process of time, the holy city, where their business would chiefly lie. (2.) The Kohathite-Levites (among whom were the posterity of Moses, though never distinguished from them) had the cities that lay in the lot of Dan, which lay next to Judah, and in that of Ephraim, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, which lay next to Benjamin. So those who descended from Aaron's father joined nearest to Aaron's sons. (3.) Gershon was the eldest son of Levi, and therefore, though the younger house of the Kohathites was preferred before his, yet his children had the precedence of the other family of Merari, v. 6. (4.) The Merarites, the youngest house, had their lot last, and it lay furthest off, v. 7. The rest of the sons of Jacob had a lot for every tribe only, but Levi, God's tribe, had a lot for each of its families; for there is a particular providence directing and attending the removals and settlements of ministers, and appointing where those shall fix who are to be the lights of the world.

9 And they gave out of the tribe of the children of Judah, and out of the tribe of the children of Simeon, these cities which are *here* mentioned by name, 10 Which the children of Aaron, *being* of the families of the Kohathites, *who were* of the children of Levi, had: for their's was the first lot. 11 And they gave them the city of Arba the father of Anak, which *city* is Hebron, in the hill *country* of Judah, with the suburbs thereof round about it. 12 But the fields of the city, and the villages thereof, gave they to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for his pos-

session. 13 Thus they gave to the children of Aaron the priest Hebron with her suburbs, *to be* a city of refuge for the slayer; and Libnah with her suburbs, 14 And Jattir with her suburbs, and Eshtemoa with her suburbs, 15 And Holon with her suburbs, and Debir with her suburbs, 16 And Ain with her suburbs, and Juttah with her suburbs, and Beth-shemesh with her suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes. 17 And out of the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with her suburbs, Geba with her suburbs, 18 Anathoth with her suburbs, and Almon with her suburbs; four cities. 19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, *were* thirteen cities with their suburbs. 20 And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites which remained of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim. 21 For they gave them Shechem with her suburbs in mount Ephraim, *to be* a city of refuge for the slayer; and Gezer with her suburbs, 22 And Kibzaim with her suburbs, and Beth-horon with her suburbs; four cities. 23 And out of the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with her suburbs, Gibbethon with her suburbs, 24 Aijalon with her suburbs, Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; four cities. 25 And out of the half tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with her suburbs, and Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; two cities. 26 All the cities *were* ten with their suburbs for the families of the children of Kohath that remained. 27 And unto the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, out of the *other* half tribe of Manasseh *they gave* Golan in Bashan with her suburbs, *to be* a city of refuge for the slayer; and Beesh-terah with her suburbs; two cities. 28 And out of the tribe of Issachar, Kishon with her suburbs, Dabareh with her suburbs, 29 Jarmuth with her suburbs, Engannim with her suburbs; four cities. 30 And out of the tribe of Asher, Mishal with her suburbs, Abdon with her suburbs, 31 Helkath with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs; four cities. 32 And out of the tribe

of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, *to be a city of refuge for the slayer*; and Hammoth-dor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities. 33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families *were* thirteen cities with their suburbs. 34 And unto the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with her suburbs, and Kartah with her suburbs, 35 Dimnah with her suburbs, Nahalal with her suburbs; four cities. 36 And out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with her suburbs, and Jahazah with her suburbs, 37 Kedemoth with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs; four cities. 38 And out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs, *to be a city of refuge for the slayer*; and Mahanaim with her suburbs, 39 Heshbon with her suburbs, Jazer with her suburbs; four cities in all. 40 So all the cities for the children of Merari by their families, which were remaining of the families of the Levites, were *by* their lot twelve cities. 41 All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel *were* forty and eight cities with their suburbs. 42 These cities were every one with their suburbs round about them: thus *were* all these cities.

We have here a particular account of the cities which were given to the children of Levi out of the several tribes, not only to be occupied and inhabited by them, as tenants to the several tribes in which they lay—no, their interest in them was not dependent and precarious, but to be owned and possessed by them as lords and proprietors, and as having the same title to them that the rest of the tribes had to their cities or lands, as appears by the law which preserved the houses in the Levites' cities from being alienated any longer than till the year of jubilee, Lev. xxv. 32, 33. Yet it is probable that the Levites having only the cities and suburbs, while the land about pertained to the tribes in which they lay, those of that tribe, for the convenience of occupying that land, might commonly rent houses of the Levites, as they could spare them in their cities, and so live among them as their tenants. Several things may be observed in this account, besides what was observed in the law concerning it, Num. xxxv

I. That the Levites were dispersed into all the tribes, and not suffered to live all together in any one part of the country. This would find them all with work, and employ them all for the good of others; for ministers, of all people, must neither be idle nor live to themselves or to one another only. Christ left his twelve disciples together in a body, but left orders that they should in due time disperse themselves, that they might *preach the gospel to every creature*. The mixing of the Levites thus with the other tribes would be an obligation upon them to walk circumspectly, and as became their sacred function, and to avoid every thing that might disgrace it. Had they lived all together, they would have been tempted to wink at one another's faults, and to excuse one another when they did amiss; but by this means they were made to see the eyes of all Israel upon them, and therefore saw it their concern to walk so as that their ministry might in nothing be blamed nor their high character suffer by their ill carriage.

II. That every tribe of Israel was adorned and enriched with its share of Levites' cities in proportion to its compass, even those that lay most remote. They were all God's people, and therefore they all had Levites among them, 1. To show kindness to, as God appointed them, Deut. xii. 19; xiv. 29. They were God's receivers, to whom the people might give their grateful acknowledgments of God's goodness, as the occasion and disposition were. 2. To receive advice and instruction from; when they could not go up to the tabernacle, to consult those who attended there, they might go to a Levites' city, and be taught the good knowledge of the Lord. Thus God set up a candle in every room of his house, to give light to all his family; as those that attended the altar *kept the charge of the Lord*, to see that no divine appointment was neglected there, so those that were scattered in the country had their charge too, which was to see that no idolatrous superstitious usages were introduced at a distance and to watch for the souls of God's Israel. Thus did God graciously provide for the keeping up of religion among them, and that they might have the word nigh them; yet, blessed be God, we, under the gospel, have it yet nigher, not only Levites in every county, but Levites in every parish, whose office it is still to teach the people knowledge, and to go before them in the things of God.

III. That there were thirteen cities, and those some of the best, appointed for the priests, the sons of Aaron, v. 19. Aaron left but two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, yet his family was now so much increased, and it was foreseen that it would in process of time grow so numerous, as to replenish all these cities, though a considerable number must of necessity be resident wherever the ark and the altar were. We read in both

Testaments of such numbers of priests that we may suppose none of all the families of Israel that came out of Egypt increased afterwards so much as that of Aaron did; and the promise afterwards to the house of Aaron is, *God shall increase you more and more, you and your children*, Ps. cxv. 12, 14. He will raise up a seed to serve him.

IV. That some of the Levites' cities were afterwards famous upon other accounts. Hebron was the city in which David began his reign, and in Mahanaim, another Levites' city (v. 38), he lay, and had his headquarters when he fled from Absalom. The first Israelite that ever wore the title of king (namely, Abimelech, the son of Gideon) reigned in Shechem, another Levites' city, v. 21.

V. That the number of them in all was more than of most of the tribes, except Judah, though the tribe of Levi was one of the least of the tribes, to show how liberal God is, and his people should be, to his ministers; yet the disproportion will not appear so great as at first it seems, if we consider that the Levites had cities only with their suburbs to dwell in, but the rest of the tribes, besides their cities (and those perhaps were many more than are named in the account of their lot), had many unwall'd towns and villages which they inhabited, besides country houses.

Upon the whole, it appears that effectual care was taken that the Levites should live both comfortably and usefully: and those, whether ministers or others, for whom Providence has done well, must look upon themselves as oblig'd thereby to do good, and, according as their capacity and opportunity are, to serve their generation.

43 And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. 44 And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45 There failed not aught of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

We have here the conclusion of this whole matter, the foregoing history summed up, and, to make it appear the more bright, compared with the promise of which it was the full accomplishment. God's word and his works mutually illustrate each other. The performance makes the promise appear very true and the promise makes the performance appear very kind.

I. God had promised to give the seed of Abraham the land of Canaan for a possession, and now at last he performed this promise

(v. 43): *They possessed it, and dwelt therein.* Though they had often forfeited the benefit of that promise, and God had long delayed the performance of it, yet at last all difficulties were conquered, and Canaan was their own. And the promise of the heavenly Canaan is as sure to all God's spiritual Israel, for it is the promise of him that cannot lie.

II. God had promised to give them rest in that land, and now they had rest round about, rest from the fatigues of their travel through the wilderness (which tedious march, perhaps, was long in their bones), rest from their wars in Canaan, and the insults which their enemies there had at first offer'd them. They now dwelt, not only in habitations of their own, but those quiet and peaceable ones; though there were Canaanites that remained, yet none that had either strength or spirit to attack them, nor so much as give them an alarm. This rest continued till they by their own sin and folly put thorns into their own beds and their own eyes.

III. God had promised to give them victory and success in their wars, and this promise likewise was fulfilled: *There stood not a man before them*, v. 44. They had the better in every battle, and which way soever they turned their forces they prospered. It is true there were Canaanites now remaining in many parts of the land, and such as afterwards made head against them, and became very formidable. But, 1. As to the present remains of the Canaanites, they were no contradiction to the promise, for God had said he would not drive them out all at once, but by *little and little*, Exod. xxiii. 30. They had now as much in their full possession as they had occasion for and as they had hands to manage, so that the Canaanites only kept possession of some of the less cultivated parts of the country against the beasts of the field, till Israel, in process of time, should become numerous enough to replenish them. 2. As to the after prevalence of the Canaanites, that was purely the effect of Israel's cowardice and slothfulness, and the punishment of their sinful inclination to the idolatries and other abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord would have cast out before them but that they harboured and indulged them. So that the foundation of God stands sure. Israel's experience of God's fidelity is here upon record, and is an acquittance under their hands to the honour of God, the vindication of his promise which had been so often distrusted, and the encouragement of all believers to the end of the world: *There failed not any good thing, no, nor aught of any good thing* (so full is it expressed), *which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel*, but in due time all came to pass, v. 45. Such an acknowledgment as this, here subscribed by Joshua in the name of all Israel, we afterwards find made by Solomon, and all Israel did in effect say *Amen* to it, 1 Kings viii 56. The inviolable

truth of God's promise, and the performance of it to the utmost, are what all the saints have been ready to bear their testimony to; and, if in any thing the performance has seemed to come short, they have been as ready to own that they themselves must bear all the blame.

## CHAP. XXII.

Many particular things we have read concerning the two tribes and a half, though nothing separated them from the rest of the tribes except the river Jordan, and this chapter is wholly concerning them. I. Joshua's dismissal of the militia of those tribes from the camp of Israel, in which they had served as auxiliaries, during all the wars of Canaan, and their return thereupon to their own country, ver. 1—9. II. The altar they built on the borders of Jordan, in token of their communion with the land of Israel, ver. 10. III. The offence which the rest of the tribes took at this altar, and the message they sent thereupon, ver. 11—20. IV. The apology which the two tribes and a half made for what they had done, ver. 21—29. V. The satisfaction which their apology gave to the rest of the tribes, ver. 30—34. And (which is strange), whereas in most differences that happen there is a fault on both sides, on this there was fault on no side: none (for aught that appears) were to be blamed, but all to be praised.

**T**HEN Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, **2** And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: **3** Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. **4** And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, *and* unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan. **5** But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. **6** So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. **7** Now to the *one* half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given *possession* in Bashan: but unto the *other* half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them, **8** And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very

much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. **9** And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

The war being ended, and ended gloriously, Joshua, as a prudent general, disbands his army, who never designed to make war their trade, and sends them home, to enjoy what they had conquered, and to beat their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks; and particularly the forces of these separate tribes, who had received their inheritance on the other side Jordan from Moses upon this condition, that their men of war should assist the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan, which they promised to do (Num. xxxii. 32), and renewed the promise to Joshua at the opening of the campaign, Josh. i. 16. And, now that they had performed their bargain, Joshua publicly and solemnly in Shiloh gives them their discharge. Whether this was done, as it was placed, not till after the land was divided, as some think, or whether after the war was ended, and before the division was made, as others think (because there was no need of their assistance in dividing the land, but only in conquering it, nor were there any of their tribes employed as commissioners in that affair, but only of the other ten, Num. xxxiv. 18, &c.), this is certain, it was not done till after Shiloh was made the head-quarters (*v.* 2), and the land was begun to be divided before they removed from Gilgal, *ch.* xiv. 6.

It is probable that this army of Reubenites and Gadites, which had led the van in all the wars of Canaan, had sometimes, in the intervals of action, and when the rest of the army retired into winter-quarters, some of them at least, made a step over Jordan, for it was not far, to visit their families, and to look after their private affairs, and perhaps tarried at home, and sent others in their room more serviceable; but still these two tribes and a half had their quota of troops ready, 40,000 in all, which, whenever there was occasion, presented themselves at their respective posts, and now attended in a body to receive their discharge. Though their affection to their families, and concern for their affairs, could not but make them, after so long an absence, very desirous to return, yet, like good soldiers, they would not move till they had orders from their general. So, though our heavenly Father's house above be ever so desirable (it is bishop Hall's allusion), yet must we stay on earth till our warfare be accomplished,

wait for a due discharge, and not anticipate the time of our removal.

I. Joshua dismisses them to the *land of their possession*, v. 4. Those that were first in the assignment of their lot were last in the enjoyment of it; they got the start of their brethren in title, but their brethren were before them in full possession; so *the last shall be first, and the first last*, that there may be something of equality.

II. He dismisses them with their pay; for who goes a warfare at his own charge? *Return with much riches unto your tents*, v. 8. Though all the land they had helped to conquer was to go to the other tribes, yet they should have their share of the plunder, and had so, and this was all the pay that any of the soldiers expected; for the wars of Canaan bore their own charges. "Go," says Joshua, "go home to your tents," that is, "your houses," which he calls *tents*, because they had been so much used to tents in the wilderness; and indeed the strongest and stately houses in this world are to be looked upon but as tents, mean and movable in comparison with our house above. "Go home with much riches, not only cattle, the spoil of the country, but silver and gold, the plunder of the cities, and," 1. "Let your brethren whom you leave behind have your good word, who have allowed you your share in full, though the land is entirely theirs, and have not offered to make any drawback. Do not say that you are losers by us." 2. "Let your brethren whom you go to, who abode by the stuff, have some share of the spoil: *Divide the spoil with your brethren*, as that was divided which was taken in the war with Midian, Num. xxxi. 27. Let your brethren that have wanted you all this while be the better for you when you come home."

III. He dismisses them with a very honourable character. Though their service was a due debt, and the performance of a promise, and they had done no more than was their duty to do, yet he highly commends them; not only gives them up their bonds, as it were, now that they had fulfilled the condition, but applauds their good services. Though it was by the favour of God and his power that Israel got possession of this land, and he must have all the glory, yet Joshua thought there was a thankful acknowledgment due to their brethren who assisted them, and whose sword and bow were employed for them. God must be chiefly eyed in our praises, yet instruments must not be altogether overlooked. He here commends them, 1. For the readiness of their obedience to their commanders, v. 2. When Moses was gone, they remembered and observed the charge he had given them; and all the orders which Joshua, as general of the forces, had issued out, they had carefully obeyed, went, and came, and did, as he appointed, Matt. viii. 9. It is as much as any thing the soldier's praise to observe the word of command 2. For

the constancy of their affection and adherence to their brethren: *You have not left them these many days*. How many days he does not say, nor can we gather it with certainty from any other place. Calvisius and others of the best chronologers compute that the conquering and dividing of the land was the work of about six or seven years, and so long these separate tribes attended their camp, and did them the best service they could. Note, It will be the honour of those that have espoused the cause of God's Israel, and twisted interests with them, to adhere to them, and never to leave them till God has given them rest, and then they shall rest with them. 3. For the faithfulness of their obedience to the divine law. They had not only done their duty to Joshua and Israel, but, which was best of all, they had made conscience of their duty to God: *You have kept the charge*, or, as the word is, *You have kept the keeping*, that is, "You have carefully and circum-spectly kept the commandment of the Lord your God, not only in this particular instance of continuing in the service of Israel to the end of the war, but, in general, you have kept up religion in your part of the camp, a rare and excellent thing among soldiers, and where it is worthy to be praised."

IV. He dismisses them with good counsel, not to cultivate their ground, fortify their cities, and, now that their hands were inured to war and victory, to invade their neighbours, and so enlarge their own territories, but to keep up serious godliness among them in the power of it. They were not political but pious instructions that he gave them, v. 5. 1. In general, to *take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law*. Those that have the commandment have it in vain unless they do the commandment; and it will not be done aright (so apt are we to turn aside, and so industrious are our spiritual enemies to turn us aside) unless we take heed, diligent heed. 2. In particular, to *love the Lord our God*, as the best of beings, and the best of friends; and as far as this principle rules in the heart, and is the spring of its pulses, there will be a constant care and sincere endeavour to *walk in his ways*, in all his ways, even those that are narrow and up-hill, in every particular instance, in all manner of conversation to *keep his commandments*, at all times and in all conditions with purpose of heart to *cleave unto him*, and to serve him and his honour, and the interest of his kingdom among men, *with all our heart and with all our soul*. What good counsel was here given to them is given to us all. God give us grace to take it!

V. He dismisses them with a blessing (v. 6), particularly the half tribe of Manasseh, to which Joshua, as an Ephraimite, was somewhat nearer akin than to the other two, and who perhaps were the more loth to depart because they left one half of their own tribe behind them, and therefore, bidding often



farewell, and lingering behind, had a second dismissal and blessing, *v.* 7. Joshua not only prayed for them as a friend, but blessed them as a father in the name of the Lord, recommending them, their families, and affairs, to the grace of God. Some by the blessing Joshua gave them understand the presents he made them, in recompence of their services; but Joshua being a prophet, and having given them one part of a prophet's reward in the instructions he gave them (*v.* 5), no doubt we must understand this of the other, even the prayers he made for them, as one having authority, and as God's vicegerent.

VI. Being thus dismissed, they returned to the land of their possession in a body (*v.* 9), ferry-boats being, it is likely, provided for their repassing Jordan. Though masters of families may sometimes have occasion to be absent, long absent, from their families, yet, when their business abroad is finished, they must remember home is their place, from which they ought not to wander as a bird from her nest.

10 And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that *are* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to. 11 And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. 12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them. 13 And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, 14 And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one *was* a head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel. 15 And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead, and they spake with them, saying, 16 Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this

that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD? 17 *Is* the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD, 18 But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, *seeing* ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel. 19 Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession *be* unclean, *then* pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD's tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God. 20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

Here is, I. The pious care of the separated tribes to keep their hold of Canaan's religion, even when they were leaving Canaan's land, that they might not be as the *sons of the stranger, utterly separated from God's people*, Isa. lvi. 3. In order to this, they built a great altar on the borders of Jordan, to be a witness for them that they were Israelites, and as such *partakers of the altar of the Lord*, 1 Cor. x. 18. When they came to Jordan (*v.* 10) they did not consult how to preserve the remembrance of their own exploits in the wars of Canaan, and the services they had done their brethren, by erecting a monument to the immortal honour of the two tribes and a half; but their relation to the church of God, together with their interest in the communion of saints, is that which they are solicitous to preserve and perpetuate the proofs and evidences of; and therefore without delay, when the thing was first proposed by some among them, who, though glad to think that they were going towards home, were sorry to think that they were going from the altar of God, immediately they erected this altar, which served as a bridge to keep up their fellowship with the other tribes in the things of God. Some think they built this altar on the Canaan-side of Jordan, in the lot of Benjamin, that, looking over the river, they might see the figure of the altar at Shiloh, when they could not

conveniently go to it; but it is more likely that they built it on their own side of the water, for what had they to do to build on another man's land without his consent? And it is said to be *over-against* the land of Canaan; nor would there have been any cause of suspecting it designed for sacrifice if they had not built it among themselves. This altar was very innocently and honestly designed, but it would have been well if, since it had in it an appearance of evil, and might be an occasion of offence to their brethren, they had consulted the oracle of God about it before they did it, or at least acquainted their brethren with their purpose, and given them the same explanation of their altar before, to prevent their jealousy, which they did afterwards, to remove it. Their zeal was commendable, but it ought to have been guided with discretion. There was no need to hasten the building of an altar for the purpose for which they intended this, but they might have taken time to consider and take advice; yet, when their sincerity was made to appear, we do not find that they were blamed for their rashness. God does, and men should, overlook the weakness of an honest zeal.

II. The holy jealousy of the other tribes for the honour of God and his altar at Shiloh. Notice was immediately brought to the princes of Israel of the setting up of this altar, *v.* 11. And they, knowing how strict and severe that law was which required them to offer all their sacrifices in the place which God should choose, and not elsewhere (*Deut.* xii. 5—7), were soon apprehensive that the setting up of another altar was an affront to the choice which God had lately made of a place to put his name in, and had a direct tendency to the worship of some other God. Now,

1. Their suspicion was very excusable, for it must be confessed the thing, *prima facie*—at first sight, looked ill, and seemed to imply a design to set up and maintain a competitor with the altar at Shiloh. It was no strained *innuendo* from the building of an altar to infer an intention to offer sacrifice upon it, and that might introduce idolatry and end in a total apostasy from the faith and worship of the God of Israel. So great a matter might this fire kindle. God is jealous for his own institutions, and therefore we should be so too, and afraid of every thing that looks like, or leads to, idolatry.

2. Their zeal, upon this suspicion, was very commendable, *v.* 12. When they apprehended that these tribes, which by the river Jordan were separated from them, were separating themselves from God, they took it as the greatest injury that could be done to themselves, and showed a readiness, if it were necessary, to put their lives in their hands in defence of the altar of God, and to take up arms for the chastising and reducing of these rebels, and to prevent the spreading of the infection, if no gentler methods would

serve, by cutting off from their body the gangrened member. They all gathered together, and Shiloh was the place of their rendezvous, because it was in defence of the divine charter lately granted to that place that they now appeared; their resolution was as became a kingdom of priests, who, being devoted to God and his service, did not *acknowledge their brethren nor know their own children*, *Deut.* xxxiii. 9. They would immediately *go up to war against them* if it appeared they had revolted from God, and were in rebellion against him. Though they were *bone of their bone*, had been *companions with them in tribulation* in the wilderness, and serviceable to them in the wars of Canaan, yet, if they turn to *serve other gods*, they will treat them as enemies, not as sons of Israel, but as *children of whoredoms*, for so God had appointed, *Deut.* xiii. 12, &c. They had but lately sheathed their swords, and retired from the perils and fatigues of war to the rest God had given them, and yet they are willing to begin a new war rather than be any way wanting in their duty to restrain, repress, and revenge, idolatry, and every step towards it—a brave resolution, and which shows them hearty for their religion, and, we hope, careful and diligent in the practice of it themselves. Corruptions in religion are best dealt with at first, before they get head and plead prescription.

3. Their prudence in the prosecution of this zealous resolution is no less commendable. God had appointed them, in cases of this nature, to *enquire and make search* (*Deut.* xiii. 14), that they might not wrong their brethren under pretence of righting their religion; accordingly they resolve here not to send forth their armies, to wage war, till they had first sent their ambassadors to enquire into the merits of the cause, and these men of the first rank, one out of each tribe, and Phinehas at the head of them to be their spokesman, *v.* 13, 14. Thus was their zeal for God tempered, guided, and governed by the *meekness of wisdom*. He that knows all things, and hates all evil things, would not punish the worst of criminals but he would first *go down and see*, *Gen.* xviii. 21. Many an unhappy strife would be prevented, or soon healed by an impartial and favourable enquiry into that which is the matter of the offence. The rectifying of mistakes and misunderstandings, and the setting of misconstrued words and actions in a true light, would be the most effectual way to accommodate both private and public quarrels, and bring them to a happy period.

4. The ambassadors' management of this matter came fully up to the sense and spirit of the congregation concerning it, and bespeaks much both of zeal and prudence.

(1.) The charge they draw up against their brethren is indeed very high, and admits no other excuse than that it was in their zeal for the honour of God, and was now intended to

justify the resentments of the congregation at Shiloh and to awaken the supposed delinquents to clear themselves, otherwise they might have suspended their judgment, or mollified it at least, and not have taken it for granted, as they do here (v. 16), that the building of this altar was a *trespass against the God of Israel*, and a trespass no less heinous than the revolt of soldiers from their captain (*you turn from following the Lord*), and the rebellion of subjects against their sovereign: *that you might rebel this day against the Lord*. Hard words. It is well they were not able to make good their charge. Let not innocency think it strange to be thus misrepresented and accused. *They laid to my charge things that I knew not.*

(2.) The aggravation of the crime charged upon their brethren is somewhat far-fetched: *Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?* v. 17. Probably that is mentioned because Phinehas, the first commissioner in this treaty, had signalized himself in that matter (Num. xxv. 7), and because we may suppose they were now about the very place in which that iniquity was committed on the other side Jordan. It is good to recollect and improve those instances of the wrath of God, revealed from heaven *against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, which have fallen out in our own time, and which we ourselves have been eye-witnesses of. He reminds them of the iniquity of Peor, [1.] As a very great sin, and very provoking to God. The building of this altar seemed but a small matter, but it might lead to an iniquity as bad as that of Peor, and therefore must be crushed in its first rise. Note, The remembrance of great sins committed formerly should engage us to stand upon our guard against the least occasions and beginnings of sin; for the way of sin is down-hill. [2.] As a sin that the whole congregation had smarted for: "*There was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, of which, in one day, there died no fewer than 24,000; was not that enough for ever to warn you against idolatry? What! will you bring upon yourselves another plague? Are you so mad upon an idolatrous altar that you will run yourselves thus upon the sword's point of God's judgments? Does not our camp still feel from that sin and the punishment of it? We are not cleansed from it unto this day; there are remaining sparks,*" *First*, "Of the infection of that sin; some among us so inclined to idolatry that if you set up another altar they will soon take occasion from that, whether you intend it or no, to worship another God." *Secondly*, "Of the wrath of God against us for that sin. We have reason to fear that, if we provoke God by another sin *to visit*, he will remember against us the iniquity of Peor, as he threatened to do that of the golden calf, Exod. xxxii. 34. And dare you wake the sleeping lion of divine vengeance?" Note, It is a foolish and dan-

gerous thing for people to think their former sins little, *too little for them*, as those do who add sin to sin, and so *treasure up wrath against the day of wrath*. Let therefore the time past suffice, 1 Pet. iv. 3.

(3.) The reason they give for their concerning themselves so warmly in this matter is very sufficient. They were obliged to it, in their own necessary defence, by the law of self-preservation: "For, if you revolt from God to-day, who knows but to-morrow his judgments may break in upon the *whole congregation* (v. 18), as in the case of Achan? v. 20. He sinned, and we all smarted for it," by which we should receive instruction, and from what God did then infer what he may do, and fear what he will do, if we do not witness against your sin, who are so many, and punish it." Note, The conservators of the public peace are obliged, in justice to the common safety, to use their power for the restraining and suppressing of vice and profaneness, lest, if it be connived at, the sin thereby become national, and bring God's judgments upon the community. Nay, we are all concerned to reprove our neighbour when he does amiss, lest we bear sin for him, Lev. xix. 17.

(4.) The offer they make is very fair and kind (v. 19), that if they thought the land of their possession unclean, for want of an altar, and therefore could not be easy without one, rather than they should set up another in competition with that at Shiloh they should be welcome to come back to the land *where the Lord's tabernacle was*, and settle there, and they would very willingly straiten themselves to make room for them. By this they showed a sincere and truly pious zeal against schism, that rather than their brethren should have any occasion to set up a separate altar, though their pretence for it, as here supposed, was very weak and grounded upon a great mistake, yet they were willing to part with a considerable share of the land which God himself had by the lot assigned them, to comprehend them and take them in among them. This was the spirit of Israelites indeed.

21 Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, 22 The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if *it be* in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,) 23 That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require *it*;

24 And if we have not *rather* done it for fear of *this* thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel? 25 For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD. 26 Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: 27 But *that it may be* a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD. 28 Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should *so* say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say *again*, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it *is* a witness between us and you. 29 God forbid that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn this day from following the LORD, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the LORD our God that *is* before his tabernacle. .

We may suppose there was a general convention called of the princes and great men of the separate tribes, to give audience to these ambassadors; or perhaps the army, as it came home, was still encamped in a body, and not yet dispersed; however it was, there were enough to represent the two tribes and a half, and to give their sense. Their reply to the warm remonstrance of the ten tribes is very fair and ingenuous. They do not retort their charge, upbraid them with the injustice and unkindness of their threatenings, nor reproach them for their rash and hasty censures, but give them a soft answer which turns away wrath, avoiding all those *grievous words which stir up anger*; they demur not to their jurisdiction, nor plead that they were not accountable to them for what they had done, nor bid them mind their own business, but, by a free and open declaration of their sincere intention in what they did, free them-

selves from the imputation they were under, and set themselves right in the opinion of their brethren, to do which they only needed to state the case and put the matter in a true light.

1. They solemnly protest against any design to use this altar for sacrifice or offering, and therefore were far from setting it up in competition with the altar at Shiloh, or from entertaining the least thought of deserting that. They had indeed set up that which had the shape and fashion of an altar, but they had not dedicated it to a religious use, had had no solemnity of its consecration, and therefore ought not to be charged with a design to put it to any such use. To gain credit to this protestation here is,

1. A solemn appeal to God concerning it, with which they begin their defence, intending thereby to give glory to God first, and then to give satisfaction to their brethren, *v. 22.*

(1.) A profound awe and reverence of God are expressed in the form of their appeal: *The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knows.* Or, as it might be read somewhat closer to the original, *The God of gods, Jehovah, the God of gods, Jehovah he knows,* which bespeaks his self-existence and self-sufficiency; he is Jehovah, and has sovereignty and supremacy over all beings and powers whatsoever, even those that are called *gods*, or that are worshipped. This brief confession of their faith would help to obviate and remove their brethren's suspicion of them, as if they intended to desert the God of Israel, and worship other gods: how could those entertain such a thought who believed him to be God over all? Let us learn hence always to speak of God with reverence and seriousness, and to mention his name with a solemn pause. Those who make their appeals to heaven with a slight, careless, "God knows," have reason to fear lest they take his name in vain, for it is very unlike this appeal. (2.) It is a great confidence of their own integrity which they express in the matter of their appeal. They refer the controversy to the God of gods, whose judgment, we are sure, is *according to truth*, such as the guilty have reason to dread and the upright to rejoice in. "If it be in rebellion or transgression that we have built this altar, to confront the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, to make a party, or to set up any new gods or worship," [1.] "He knows it (*v. 22*), for he is perfectly acquainted with the thoughts and intents of the heart, and particularly with all inclinations to idolatry (*Ps. xlv. 20, 21*); this is in a particular manner before him. We believe he knows it, and we cannot by any arts conceal it from him." [2.] "Let him require it, as we know he will, for he is a jealous God." Nothing but a clear conscience would have thus imprecated divine justice to avenge the rebellion if there had been any. Note, *First*, In every thing we do in religion, it highly concerns us to approve

ourselves to God in our integrity therein, remembering that he knows the heart. *Secondly*, When we fall under the censures of men, it is very comfortable to be able with a humble confidence to appeal to God concerning our sincerity. See 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

2. A sober apology presented to their brethren: *Israel, he shall know*. Though the record on high, and the witness in our bosoms, are principally to be made sure for us, yet there is a satisfaction besides which we owe to our brethren who doubt concerning our integrity, and which we should be ready to give with meekness and fear. If our sincerity be known to God, we should study likewise to let others know it by its fruits, especially those who, though they mistake us, yet show a zeal for the glory of God, as the ten tribes here did.

3. A serious abjuration or renunciation of the design which they were suspected to be guilty of. With this they conclude their defence (v. 29): "*God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord*, as we own we should if we had set up this altar for burnt-offerings; no, we abhor the thought of it. We have as great a value and veneration for the altar of the Lord at Shiloh as any of the tribes of Israel have, and are as firmly resolved to adhere to it and constantly to attend it; we have the same concern that you have for the purity of God's worship and the unity of his church; far be it, far be it from us, to think of turning away from following God."

11. They fully explain their true intent and meaning in building this altar; and we have all the reason in the world to believe that it is a true representation of their design, and not advanced now to palliate it afterwards, as we have reason to think that these same persons meant very honestly when they petitioned to have their lot on that side Jordan, though then also it was their unhappiness to be misunderstood even by Moses himself. In their vindication, they make it out that the building of this altar was so far from being a step towards a separation from their brethren, and from the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, that, on the contrary, it was really designed for a pledge and preservative of their communion with their brethren and with the altar of God, and a token of their resolution to *do the service of the Lord before him* (v. 27), and to continue to do so.

1. They gave an account of the fears they had lest, in process of time, their posterity, being seated at such a distance from the tabernacle, should be looked upon and treated as strangers to the commonwealth of Israel (v. 24); it was for fear of this thing, and the word signifies a great perplexity and solicitude of mind which they were in, until they eased themselves by this expedient. As they were returning home (and we may suppose it was not thought of before, else they would have made Joshua acquainted with their purpose), some of them in discourse

started this matter, and the rest took the hint, and represented to themselves and one another a very melancholy prospect of what might probably happen in after-ages, that their children would be looked upon by the other tribes as having no interest in the altar of God and the sacrifices there offered. Now indeed they were owned as brethren, and were as welcome at the tabernacle as any other of the tribes; but what if their children after them should be disowned? They, by reason of their distance, and the interposition of Jordan, which it was not easy at all times to pass and repass, could not be so numerous and constant in their attendance on the three yearly feasts as the other tribes, to make a continual claim to the privileges of Israelites, and would therefore be looked upon as inconsiderable members of their church, and by degrees would be rejected as not members of it at all: *So shall your children* (whom in their pride will be apt to monopolize the privileges of the altar) *make our children* (who perhaps will not be so careful as they ought to be to keep hold of those privileges) *cease from fearing the Lord*. Note, (1.) Those that are cut off from public ordinances are likely to lose all religion, and will by degrees cease from fearing the Lord. Though the form and profession of godliness are kept up by many without the life and power of it, yet the life and power of it will not long be kept up without the form and profession. You take away grace if you take away the means of grace. (2.) Those who have themselves found the comfort and benefit of God's ordinances cannot but desire to preserve and perpetuate the entail of them upon their seed, and use all possible precautions that their children after them may not be *made to cease from following the Lord*, or be looked upon as having no part in him.

2. The project they had to prevent this, v. 26—28. "Therefore, to secure an interest in the altar of God to those who shall come after us, and to prove their title to it, *we said, Let us build an altar, to be a witness between us and you*," that, having this copy of the altar in their custody, it might be produced as an evidence of their right to the privileges of the original. Every one that saw this altar, and observed that it was never used for sacrifice and offering, would enquire what was the meaning of it, and this answer would be given to that enquiry, that it was built by those separate tribes, in token of their communion with their brethren and their joint-interest with them in the altar of the Lord. Christ is the great altar that sanctifies every gift; the best evidence of our interest in him will be the pattern of his Spirit in our hearts, and our conformity to him. If we can produce this it will be a testimony for us that we have *a part in the Lord*, and an earnest of our perseverance in following him.

30 And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which *were* with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasse spake, it pleased them. 31 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasse, This day we perceive that the LORD *is* among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD. 32 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad, out of the land of Gilead, unto the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought them word again. 33 And the thing pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God, and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. 34 And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: for it *shall be* a witness between us that the LORD *is* God.

We have here the good issue of this controversy, which, if there had not been on both sides a disposition to peace, as there was on both sides a zeal for God, might have been of ill consequence; for quarrels about religion, for want of wisdom and love, often prove the most fierce and most difficult to be accommodated. But these contending parties, when the matter was fairly stated and argued, were so happy as to understand one another very well, and so the difference was presently compromised.

1. The ambassadors were exceedingly pleased when the separate tribes had given in a protestation of the innocency of their intentions in building this altar. 1. The ambassadors did not call in question their sincerity in that protestation, did not say, "You tell us you design it not for sacrifice and offering, but who can believe you? What security will you give us that it shall never be so used?" No. *Charity believes all things, hopes all things*, believes and hopes the best, and is very loth to give the lie to any. 2. They did not upbraid them with the rashness and unadvisedness of this action, did not tell them, "If you would do such a

thing, and with this good intention, yet you might have had so much respect for Joshua and Eleazar as to have advised with them, or at least have made them acquainted with it, and so have saved the trouble and expense of this embassy." But a little want of consideration and good manners should be excused and overlooked in those who, we have reason to think, mean honestly. 3. Much less did they go about to fish for evidence to make out their charge, because they had once exhibited it, but were glad to have their mistake rectified, and were not at all ashamed to own it. Proud and peevish spirits, when they have passed an unjust censure upon their brethren, though ever so much convincing evidence be brought of the injustice of it, will stand to it, and can by no means be persuaded to retract it. These ambassadors were not so prejudiced; their brethren's vindication pleased them, v. 30. They looked upon their innocency as a token of God's presence (v. 31), especially when they found that what was done was so far from being an indication of their growing cool to the altar of God that, on the contrary, it was a fruit of their zealous affection to it: *You have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord*, that is, "You have not, as we feared, delivered them into the hand of the Lord, or exposed them to his judgments by the trespass we were jealous of."

II. The congregation was abundantly satisfied when their ambassadors reported to them their brethren's apology for what they had done. It should seem they staid together, at least by their representatives, until they heard the issue (v. 32); and when they understood the truth of the matter it pleased them (v. 33), and they *blessed God*. Note, Our brethren's constancy in religion, their zeal for the power of godliness, and their keeping the *unity of the Spirit* in faith and love, notwithstanding the jealousies conceived of them as breaking the unity of the church, are things which we should be very glad to be satisfied of, and should make the matter both of our rejoicing and of our thanksgiving; let God have the glory of it, and let us take the comfort of it. Being thus satisfied, they laid down their arms immediately, and were so far from any thoughts of prosecuting the war they had been meditating against their brethren that we may suppose them wishing for the next feast, when they should meet them at Shiloh.

III. The separate tribes were gratified, and, since they had a mind to preserve among them this pattern of the altar of God, though there was not likely to be that occasion for it which they fancied, yet Joshua and the princes let them have their humour, and did not give orders for the demolishing of it, though there was as much reason to fear that it might in process of time be an occasion of idolatry as there was to hope that ever it

might be a preservation from idolatry. Thus did the strong bear the infirmities of the weak. Only care was taken that they having explained the meaning of their altar, that it was intended for no more than a testimony of their communion with the altar at Shiloh, this explanation should be recorded, which was done according to the usage of those times by giving a name to it signifying so much (v. 34); they called it *Ed*, a witness to that, and no more, a witness of the relation they stood in to God and Israel, and of their concurrence with the rest of the tribes in the same common faith, that *Jehovah he is God*, he and no other. It was a witness to posterity of their care to transmit their religion pure and entire to them, and would be a witness against them if ever they should forsake God and turn from following after him.

## CHAP. XXIII.

To this and the following chapter we have two farewell sermons, which Joshua preached to the people of Israel a little before his death. Had he designed to gratify the curiosity of succeeding ages, he would rather have recorded the method of Israel's settlement in their new conquests, their husbandry, manufactures, trade, customs, courts of justice, and the constitutions of their infant commonwealth, which one would wish to be informed of; but that which he intended in the registers of this book was to entail on posterity a sense of religion and their duty to God; and therefore, overlooking these things which are the usual subjects of a common history, he here transmits to his reader the methods he took to persuade Israel to be faithful to their covenant with their God, which might have a good influence on the generations to come who should read those reasonings, as we may hope they had on that generation which then heard them. In this chapter we have, I. A convention of the states called (ver. 1, 2), probably to consult about the common concerns of their land, and to set in order that which, after some years' trial, being left to their prudence, was found wanting. II. Joshua's speech to them at the opening, or perhaps at the concluding, of the sessions, to hear which was the principal design of their coming together. In it, I. Joshua reminds them of what God had done for them (ver. 3, 4, 9, 14), and what he was ready to do yet further, ver. 5, 10. 2. He exhorts them carefully and resolutely to persevere in their duty to God, ver. 6, 8, 11. III. He cautions them against all familiarity with their idolatrous neighbours, ver. 7. IV. He gives them fair warning of the fatal consequences of it, if they should revolt from God and turn to idols, ver. 12, 13, 15, 16. In all this he showed himself zealous for his God, and jealous over Israel with a godly jealousy.

**A**ND it came to pass, and a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age: 3 And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is he that hath fought for you. 4 Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. 5 And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall pos-

sess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you. 6 Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; 7 That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them. 8 But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day. 9 For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. 10 One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.

As to the date of this edict of Joshua,

I. No mention at all is made of the place where this general assembly was held; some think it was at Timnath-serah, Joshua's own city, where he lived, and whence, being old, he could not well remove. But it does not appear that he took so much state upon him; therefore it is more probable this meeting was at Shiloh, where the tabernacle of meeting was, and to which place, perhaps, all the males that could had now come up to worship before the Lord, at one of the three great feasts, which Joshua took the opportunity of, for the delivering of this charge to them.

II. There is only a general mention of the time when this was done. It was long after the Lord had given them rest, but it is not said how long, v. 1. It was, 1. So long as that Israel had time to feel the comforts of their rest and possessions in Canaan, and to enjoy the advantages of that good land. 2. So long as that Joshua had time to observe which way their danger lay of being corrupted, namely, by their intimacy with the Canaanites that remained, against which he is therefore careful to arm them.

III. The persons to whom Joshua made this speech: To all Israel, even their elders, &c. So it might be read, v. 2. They could not all come within hearing, but he called for all the elders, that is, the privy-counsellors, which in later times constituted the great Sanhedrim, the heads of the tribes, that is, the noblemen and gentlemen of their respective countries, the judges learned in the laws, that tried criminals and causes, and gave judgment upon them, and, lastly, the officers or sheriffs, who were entrusted with the execution of

those judgments. These Joshua called together, and to them he addressed himself, 1. That they might communicate what he said, or at least the sense and substance of it, to those under them in their respective countries, and so this charge might be dispersed through the whole nation. 2. Because, if they would be prevailed upon to serve God and cleave to him, they, by their influence on the common people, would keep them faithful. If great men be good men, they will help to make many good.

IV. Joshua's circumstances when he gave them this charge: He was old and stricken in age (v. 1), probably it was in the last year of his life, and he lived to be 110 years old, ch. xxiv. 29. And he himself takes notice of it, in the first words of his discourse, v. 2. When he began to be old, some years ago, God reminded him of it (ch. xiii. 1): *Thou art old*. But now he did himself feel so much of the decays of age that he needed not to be told of it, he readily speaks of it himself: *I am old and stricken in age*. He uses it, 1. As an argument with himself to give them this charge, because being old he could expect to be but a little while with them, to advise and instruct them, and therefore (as Peter speaks, 2 Pct. i. 13) *as long as he is in this tabernacle* he will take all opportunities to put them in remembrance of their duty, knowing by the increasing infirmities of age that he must shortly put off this tabernacle, and desiring that after his decease they might continue as good as they were now. When we see death hastening towards us, this should quicken us to do the work of life with all our might. 2. As an argument with them to give heed to what he said. He was old and experienced, and therefore to be more regarded, for days should speak; he had grown old in their service, and had spent himself for their good, and therefore was to be the more regarded by them. He was old and dying; they would not have him long to preach to them; therefore let them observe what he said now, and lay it up in store for the time to come.

V. The discourse itself, the scope of which is to engage them if possible, them and their seed after them, to persevere in the true faith and worship of the God of Israel.

1. He puts them in mind of the great things God had done for them, now in his days, and under his administration, for here he goes no further back. And for the proof of this he appeals to their own eyes (v. 3): *"You have seen all that the Lord your God has done; not what I have done, or what you have done (we were only instruments in God's hand), but what God himself has done by me and for you."* (1.) Many great and mighty nations (as the rate of nations then went) were driven out from as fine a country as any was at that time upon the face of the earth, to make room for Israel. "You see what he has done to these nations, who were his

creatures, the work of his hands, and whom he could have made new creatures and fit for his service; yet see what destruction he has made of them because of you (v. 2), how he has driven them out from before you (v. 9), as if they were of no account with him, though great and strong in comparison with you." (2.) They were not only driven out (this they might have been, and yet sent to some other country less rich to begin a new plantation there, suppose to that wilderness in which Israel had wandered so long, and so they would only have exchanged seats with them), but they were trodden down before them; though they held out against them with the greatest obstinacy that could be, yet they were subdued before them, which made the possessing of their land so much the more glorious to Israel and so much the more illustrious an instance of the power and goodness of the God of Israel (v. 3): *"The Lord your God has not only led you, and fed you, and kept you, but he has fought for you as a man of war,"* by which title he was known among them when he first brought them out of Egypt, Exod. xv. 3. So clear and cheap were all their victories, during the course of this long war, that no man had been able to stand before them (v. 9), that is, to make head against them, so as to put them in fear, create them any difficulty, or give any check to the progress of their victorious arms. In every battle they carried the day, and in every siege they carried the city; their loss before Ai was upon a particular occasion, was inconsiderable, and only served to show them on what terms they stood with God; but, otherwise, never was army crowned with such a constant uninterrupted series of successes as the armies of Israel were in the wars of Canaan. (3.) They had not only conquered the Canaanites, but were put in full possession of their land (v. 4): *"I have divided to you by lot these nations, both those which are cut off and those which remain, not only that you may spoil and plunder them, and live at discretion in their country for a time, but to be a sure and lasting inheritance for your tribes. You have it not only under your feet, but in your hands."*

2. He assures them of God's readiness to carry on and complete this glorious work in due time. It is true some of the Canaanites did yet remain, and in some places were strong and daring, but this should be no disappointment to their expectations; when Israel was so multiplied as to be able to replenish this land God would expel the Canaanites to the last man, provided Israel would pursue their advantages and carry on the war against them with vigour (v. 5): *"The Lord your God will drive them from out of your sight, so that there shall not be a Canaanite to be seen in the land; and even that part of the country which is yet in their hands you shall possess."* If it were objected that the men of war of the several



tribes being dispersed to their respective countries, and the army disbanded, it would be difficult to get them together when there was occasion to renew the war upon the remainder of the Canaanites, in answer to this he tells them what little need they had to be in care about the numbers of their forces (v. 10): *One man of you shall chase a thousand*, as Jonathan did, 1 Sam. xiv. 13. "Each trihe may venture for itself, and for the recovery of its own lot, without fearing disadvantage by the disproportion of numbers; for the Lord your God, whose all power is, both to inspirit and to dispirit, and who has all the creatures at his beck, *he it is that fighteth for you*; and how many do you reckon him for?"

3. He hereupon most earnestly charges them to adhere to their duty, to go on and persevere in the good ways of the Lord wherein they had so well set out. He exhorts them,

(1.) To be very courageous (v. 6): "God fighteth for you against your enemies, do you therefore *behave yourselves valiantly* for him. Keep and do with a firm resolution *all that is written in the book of the law*." He presses upon them no more than what they were already bound to. "Keep with care, do with diligence, and eye what is written with sincerity."

(2.) To be very cautious: "Take heed of missing it, either on the right hand or on the left, for there are errors and extremes on both hands. Take heed of running either into a profane neglect of any of God's institutions or into a superstitious addition of any of your own inventions." They must especially take heed of all approaches towards idolatry, the sin to which they were first inclined and would be most tempted, v. 7. [1.] They must not acquaint themselves with idolaters, nor come among them to visit them or be present at any of their feasts or entertainments, for they could not contract any intimacy nor keep up any conversation with them, without danger of infection. [2.] They must not show the least respect to any idol, nor *make mention of the name of their gods*, but endeavour to hurry the remembrance of them in perpetual oblivion, that the worship of them may never be revived. "Let the very name of them be forgotten. Look upon idols as filthy detestable things, not to be named without the utmost loathing and detestation." The Jews would not suffer their children to name swine's flesh, because it was forbidden, lest the name of it should occasion their desiring it; but, if they had occasion to speak of it, they must call it *that strange thing*. It is a pity that among Christians the names of the heathen gods are so commonly used, and made so familiar as they are, especially in plays and poems: let those names which have been set up in rivalry with God be for ever loathed and lost. [3.] They must not countenance others in show-

ing respect to them. They must not only not swear by them themselves, but they must not cause others to swear by them, which supposes that they must not make any covenants with idolaters, because they, in the confirming of their covenants, would swear by their idols; never let Israelites admit such an oath. [4.] They must take heed of these occasions of idolatry, lest by degrees they should arrive at the highest step of it, which was serving false gods, and bowing down to them, against the letter of the second commandment.

(3.) To be very constant (v. 8): *Cleave unto the Lord your God*, that is, "delight in him, depend upon him, devote yourselves to his glory, and continue to do so to the end, *as you have done unto this day*, ever since you came to Canaan;" for, being willing to make the best of them, he looks not so far back as the iniquity of Peor. There might be many things amiss among them, but they had not forsaken the Lord their God, and it is in order to insinuate his exhortation to perseverance with the more pleasing power that he praises them. "Go on and prosper, for the Lord is with you while you are with him." Those that command should commend; the way to make people better is to make the best of them. "You have cleaved to the Lord unto this day, therefore go on to do so, else you lose the praise and recompence of what you have wrought. Your righteousness will not be mentioned unto you if you turn from it."

11 Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. 12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: 13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any* of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. 14 And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof. 15 Therefore it shall come to pass, *that* as all good things are

come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. 16 When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

Here, I. Joshua directs them what to do, that they might persevere in religion, v. 11. Would we cleave to the Lord, and not forsake him, 1. We must always stand upon our guard, for many a precious soul is lost and ruined through carelessness. "Take heed therefore, *take good heed to yourselves, to your souls* (so the word is), that the inward man be kept clean from the pollutions of sin, and closely employed in the service of God." God has given us precious souls with this charge, "Take good heed to them, keep them with all diligence, above all keepings." 2. What we do in religion we must do from a principle of love, not by constraint or from a slavish fear of God, but of choice and with delight. "*Love the Lord your God, and you will not leave him.*"

II. He urges God's fidelity to them as an argument why they should be faithful to him (v. 14): "*I am going the way of all the earth, I am old and dying.*" To die is to go a journey, a journey to our long home; it is the way of all the earth, the way that all mankind must go, sooner or later. Joshua himself, though so great and good a man, and one that could so ill be spared, cannot be exempted from this common lot. He takes notice of it here that they might look upon these as his dying words, and regard them accordingly. Or thus: "*I am dying, and leaving you. Me you have not always; but if you cleave to the Lord he will never leave you.*" Or thus, "Now that I am near my end it is proper to look back upon the years that are past; and, in the review, I find, and you yourselves know it in all your hearts and in all your souls, by a full conviction on the clearest evidence, and the thing has made an impression upon you"—(that knowledge does us good which is seated, not in the head only, but in the heart and soul, and with which we are duly affected)—"you know that *not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord spoke concerning you*" (and he had promised them victory, rest, plenty, his tabernacle among them, &c., and *not one thing had failed of all he had promised.* "Now," said he, "has God been thus true

to you? Be not you false to him." It is the apostle's argument for perseverance (Heb. x. 23), *He is faithful that has promised*

III. He gives them fair warning what would be the fatal consequences of apostasy (v. 12, 13, 15, 16): "If you go back, know for a certainty it will be your ruin." Observe,

1. How he describes the apostasy which he warns them against. The steps of it would be (v. 12) growing intimate with idolaters, who would craftily wheedle them, and insinuate themselves into their acquaintance, now that they had become lords of the country, to serve their own ends. The next step would be intermarrying with them, drawn to it by their artifices, who would be glad to bestow their children upon these wealthy Israelites. And the consequence of that would be (v. 16) *serving other gods* (which were pretended to be the ancient deities of the country) and bowing down to them. Thus the way of sin is down-hill, and those who have fellowship with sinners cannot avoid having fellowship with sin. This he represents, (1.) As a base and shameful desertion; "it is going back from what you have so well begun," v. 12. (2.) As a most perfidious breach of promise (v. 16): "It is a transgression of the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and which you yourselves set your hand to." Other sins were transgressions of the law God commanded them, but this was a transgression of the covenant he commanded them, and amounted to a breach of the relation between God and them and a forfeiture of all the benefits of the covenant.

2. How he describes the destruction which he warns them of. He tells them, (1.) That these remainders of the Canaanites, if they should harbour them, and indulge them, and join in affinity with them, would be snares and traps to them, both to draw them to sin (not only to idolatry, but to all immoralities, which would be the ruin, not only of their virtue, but of their wisdom and sense, their spirit and honour), and also to draw them into foolish bargains, unprofitable projects, and all manner of inconveniences; and having thus by underhand practices decoyed them into one mischief or other, so as to gain advantages against them, they would then act more openly, and be *scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes*, would perhaps kill or drive away their cattle, burn or steal their corn, alarm or plunder their houses, and would by all ways possible be vexatious to them; for, whatever pretences of friendship they might make, a Canaanite, unless proselyted to the faith and worship of the true God, would in every age hate the very name and sight of an Israelite. See how the punishment would be made to answer the sin, nay, how the sin itself would be the punishment. (2.) That the anger of the Lord would be kindled against them. Their making leagues with the Canaanites would

not only give those idolaters the opportunity of doing them a mischief, and be the fostering of snakes in their bosoms, but it would likewise provoke God to become their enemy, and would kindle the fire of his displeasure against them. (3.) That all the threatenings of the word would be fulfilled, as the promise had been, for the God of eternal truth is faithful to both (v. 15). "*As all good things have come upon you according to the promise, so long as you have kept close to God, so all evil things will come upon you according to the threatening, if you forsake him.*" Moses had *set before them good and evil*; they had experienced the good, and were now in the enjoyment of it, and the evil would as certainly come if they were disobedient. As God's promises are not a fool's paradise, so his threatenings are not bugbears. (4.) That it would end in the utter ruin of their church and nation, as Moses had foretold. This is three times mentioned here. Your enemies will vex you *until you perish from off this good land, v. 13.* Again, "*God will plague you until he have destroyed you from off this good land, v. 15.* Heaven and earth will concur to root you out, so that (v. 16) *you shall perish from off the good land.*" It will aggravate their perdition that the land from which they shall perish is a good land, and a land which God himself had given them, and which therefore he would have secured to them if they by their wickedness had not thrown themselves out of it. Thus the goodness of the heavenly Canaan, and the free and sure grant God has made of it, will aggravate the misery of those that shall for ever be shut out and perish from it. Nothing will make them see how wretched they are so much as to see how happy they might have been. Joshua thus sets before them the fatal consequences of their apostasy, that, *knowing the terror of the Lord,* they might be persuaded *with purpose of heart to cleave to him.*

## CHAP. XXIV.

This chapter concludes the life and reign of Joshua, in which we have, 1. The great care and pains he took to confirm the people of Israel in the true faith and worship of God, that they might, after his death, persevere therein. In order to this he called another general assembly of the heads of the congregation of Israel (ver. 1) and dealt with them, 1. By way of narrative, recounting the great things God had done for them and their fathers, ver. 2—13. 2. By way of charge to them, in consideration thereof, to serve God, ver. 14. 3. By way of treaty with them, wherein he aims to bring them, (1.) To make religion their deliberate choice; and they did so, with reasons for their choice, ver. 15—18. (2.) To make it their determinate choice, and to resolve to adhere to it, ver. 19—24. 4. By way of covenant upon that treaty, ver. 25—28. II. The conclusion of this history, with, 1. The death and burial of Joshua (ver. 29, 30) and Eleazar (ver. 33), and the mention of the burial of Joseph's bones upon that occasion, ver. 32. 2. A general account of the state of Israel at that time, ver. 31.

**A**ND Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,

Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even Terah* the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. 3 And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. 4 And I gave unto Isaac, Jacob, and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt. 5 I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out. 6 And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea. 7 And when they cried unto the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them, and covered them; and your eyes have seen what I have done in Egypt: and ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season. 8 And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you. 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you: 10 But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand. 11 And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand. 12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, *even* the two kings of the Amorites; *but* not with the sword, nor with thy bow. 13 And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye

built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. 14 Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

Joshua thought he had taken his last farewell of Israel in the solemn charge he gave them in the foregoing chapter, when he said, *I go the way of all the earth*; but God graciously continuing his life longer than expected, and renewing his strength, he was desirous to improve it for the good of Israel. He did not say, "I have taken my leave of them once, and let that serve;" but, having yet a longer space given him, he summons them together again, that he might try what more he could do to engage them for God. Note, We must never think our work for God done till our life is done; and, if he lengthen out our days beyond what we thought, we must conclude it is because he has some further service for us to do.

The assembly is the same with that in the foregoing chapter, the *elders, heads, judges, and officers of Israel*, v. 1. But it is here made somewhat more solemn than it was there.

1. The place appointed for their meeting is *Shechem*, not only because that lay nearer to Joshua than Shiloh, and therefore more convenient now that he was infirm and unfit for travelling, but because it was the place where Abraham, the first trustee of God's covenant with this people, settled at his coming to Canaan, and where God appeared to him (Gen. xii. 6, 7), and near which stood mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where the people had renewed their covenant with God at their first coming into Canaan, Josh. viii. 30. Of the promises God had made to their fathers, and of the promises they themselves had made to God, this place might serve to put them in mind.

11. They presented themselves not only before Joshua, but before God, in this assembly, that is, they came together in a solemn religious manner, as into the special presence of God, and with an eye to his speaking to them by Joshua; and it is probable the service began with prayer. It is the conjecture of interpreters that upon this great occasion Joshua ordered the ark of God to be brought by the priests to Shechem, which, they say, was about ten miles from Shiloh, and to be set down in the place of their meeting, which is therefore called (v. 26) *the sanctuary of the Lord*, the presence of the ark making it so at that time; and this was done to grace the solemnity, and to strike an awe upon the people that attended. We have not now any such sensible tokens of the divine presence, but are to believe that

where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name he is as really in the midst of them as God was where the ark was, and they are indeed presenting themselves before him.

111. Joshua spoke to them in God's name, and as from him, in the language of a prophet (v. 2): "*Thus saith the Lord, Jehovah, the great God, and the God of Israel, your God in covenant, whom therefore you are bound to hear and give heed to.*" Note, The word of God is to be received by us as his, whoever is the messenger that brings it, whose greatness cannot add to it, nor his meanness diminish from it. His sermon consists of doctrine and application.

1. The doctrinal part is a history of the great things God had done for his people, and for their fathers before them. God by Joshua recounts the marvels of old: "I did so and so." They must know and consider, not only that such and such things were done, but that God did them. It is a series of wonders that is here recorded, and perhaps many more were mentioned by Joshua, which for brevity's sake are here omitted. See what God had wrought. (1.) He brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, v. 2, 3. He and his ancestors had served other gods there, for it was the country in which, though celebrated for learning, idolatry, as some think, had its rise; there *the world by wisdom knew not God*. Abraham, who afterwards was the friend of God and the great favourite of heaven, was bred up in idolatry, and lived long in it, till God by his grace snatched him as a brand out of that burning. Let them remember that rock out of which they were hewn, and not relapse into that sin from which their fathers by a miracle of free grace were delivered. "I took him," says God, "else he had never come out of that sinful state." Hence Abraham's justification is made by the apostle an instance of God's *justifying the ungodly*, Rom. iv. 5. (2.) He brought him to Canaan, and built up his family, led him through the land to Shechem, where they now were, multiplied his seed by Ishmael, who begat twelve princes, but at last gave him Isaac the promised son, and in him multiplied his seed. When Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, God provided an inheritance for Esau elsewhere in Mount Seir, that the land of Canaan might be reserved entire for the seed of Jacob, and the posterity of Esau might not pretend to a share in it. (3.) He delivered the seed of Jacob out of Egypt with a high hand (v. 5, 6), and rescued them out of the hands of Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea, v. 6, 7. The same waters were the Israelites' guard and the Egyptians' grave, and this in answer to prayer; for, though we find in the story that they in that distress murmured against God (Exod. xiv. 11, 12), notice is here taken of their *crying to God*; he graciously accepted those that prayed to him, and overlooked the folly of those that quarrelled with him. (4.)

He protected them in the wilderness, where they are here said, not to *wander*, but to *dwell for a long season*, v. 7. So wisely were all their motions directed, and so safely were they kept, that even there they had as certain a dwelling-place as if they had been in a walled city. (5.) He gave them the land of the Amorites, on the other side Jordan (v. 8), and there defeated the plot of Balak and Balaam against them, so that Balaam could not curse them as he desired, and therefore Balak durst not fight them as he designed, and as, because he designed it, he is here said to have done it. The turning of Balaam's tongue to bless Israel, when he intended to curse them, is often mentioned as an instance of the divine power put forth in Israel's favour as remarkable as any, because in it God proved (and does still, more than we are aware of) his dominion over the powers of darkness, and over the spirits of men. (6.) He brought them safely and triumphantly into Canaan, delivered the Canaanites into their hand (v. 11), *sent hornets before them*, when they were actually engaged in battle with the enemy, which with their stings tormented them and with their noise terrified them, so that they became a very easy prey to Israel. These dreadful swarms first appeared in their war with Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, and afterwards in their other battles, v. 12. God had promised to do this for them, Exod. xxiii. 27, 28. And here Joshua takes notice of the fulfilling of that promise. See Exod. xxiii. 27, 28; Dent. vii. 20. These hornets, it should seem, annoyed the enemy more than the artillery of Israel, and therefore he adds, *not with thy sword nor bow*. It was purely the Lord's doing. *Lastly*, They were now in the peaceable possession of a good land, and lived comfortably upon the fruit of other people's labours, v. 13.

2. The application of this history of God's mercies to them is by way of exhortation to fear and serve God, in gratitude for his favour, and that it might be continued to them, v. 14. Now therefore, in consideration of all this, (1.) "*Fear the Lord*, the Lord and his goodness, Hos. iii. 5. Reverence a God of such infinite power, fear to offend him and to forfeit his goodness, keep up an awe of his majesty, a deference to his authority, a dread of his displeasure, and a continual regard to his all-seeing eye upon you." (2.) Let your practice be consonant to this principle, and serve him both by the outward acts of religious worship and every instance of obedience in your whole conversation, and this *in sincerity and truth*, with a single eye and an upright heart, and inward impressions answerable to outward expressions." This is the *truth in the inward part*, which God requires, Ps. li. 6. For what good will it do us to dissemble with God that searches the heart? (3.) *Put away the strange gods*, both Chaldean and Egyptian idols, for those they were most in

danger of revolting to. It should seem by this charge, which is repeated (v. 23), that there were some among them that privately kept in their closets the images or pictures of these dunghill-deities, which came to their hands from their ancestors, as heir-looms of their families, though, it may be, they did not worship them; these Joshua earnestly urges them to throw away: "Deface them, destroy them, lest you be tempted to serve them." Jacob pressed his household to do this, and at this very place; for, when they gave him up the little images they had, he buried them *under the oak which was by Shechem*, Gen. xxxv. 2, 4. Perhaps the oak mentioned here (v. 26) was the same oak, or another in the same place, which might be well called *the oak of reformation*, as there were idolatrous oaks.

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. 16 And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; 17 For the LORD our God, he *is* that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: 18 And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: *therefore* will we also serve the LORD; for he *is* our God. 19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he *is* a holy God; he *is* a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. 21 And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. 22 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye *are* witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, *We are* witnesses. 23 Now therefore put away, *said he*,

the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. 24 And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. 26 And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. 27 And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. 28 So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.

Never was any treaty carried on with better management, nor brought to a better issue, than this of Joshua with the people, to engage them to serve God. The manner of his dealing with them shows him to have been in earnest, and that his heart was much upon it, to leave them under all possible obligations to cleave to him, particularly the obligation of a choice and of a covenant.

I. Would it be any obligation upon them if they made the service of God their choice?—he here puts them to their choice, not as if it were antecedently indifferent whether they served God or no, or as if they were at liberty to refuse his service, but because it would have a great influence upon their perseverance in religion if they embraced it with the reason of men and with the resolution of men. These two things he here brings them to.

1. He brings them to embrace their religion rationally and intelligently, for it is a reasonable service. The will of man is apt to glory in its native liberty, and, in a jealousy for the honour of this, adheres with most pleasure to that which is its own choice and is not imposed upon it; therefore it is God's will that this service should be, not our chance, or a force upon us, but our choice. Accordingly,

(1.) Joshua fairly puts the matter to their choice, v. 15. Here, [1.] He proposes the candidates that stand for the election. The Lord, Jehovah, on one side, and on the other side either the gods of their ancestors, which would pretend to recommend themselves to those that were fond of antiquity, and that which was received by tradition from their fathers, or the gods of their neighbours, the Amorites, in whose land they dwell, which

would insinuate themselves into the affections of those that were complaisant and fond of good fellowship. [2.] He supposes there were those to whom, upon some account or other, it would seem evil to serve the Lord. There are prejudices and objections which some people raise against religion, which, with those that are inclined to the world and the flesh, have great force. It seems evil to them, hard and unreasonable, to be obliged to deny themselves, mortify the flesh, take up their cross, &c. But, being in a state of probation, it is fit there should be some difficulties in the way, else there were no trial. [3.] He refers it to themselves: "Choose you whom you will serve, choose this day, now that the matter is laid thus plainly before you, speedily bring it to a head, and do not stand hesitating." Elijah, long after this, referred the decision of the controversy between Jehovah and Baal to the consciences of those with whom he was treating, 1 Kings xviii. 21. Joshua's putting the matter here to this issue plainly intimates two things:—*First*, That it is the will of God we should every one of us make religion our serious and deliberate choice. Let us state the matter impartially to ourselves, weigh things in an even balance, and then determine for that which we find to be really true and good. Let us resolve upon a life of serious godliness, not merely because we know no other way, but because really, upon search, we find no better. *Secondly*, That religion has so much self-evident reason and righteousness on its side that it may safely be referred to every man that allows himself a free thought either to choose or refuse it; for the merits of the cause are so plain that no considerate man can do otherwise but choose it. The case is so clear that it determines itself. Perhaps Joshua designed, by putting them to their choice, thus to try if there were any among them who, upon so fair an occasion given, would show a coolness and indifference towards the service of God, whether they would desire time to consider and consult their friends before they gave in an answer, and if any such should appear he might set a mark upon them, and warn the rest to avoid them. [4.] He directs their choice in this matter by an open declaration of his own resolutions: "But as for me and my house, whatever you do, we will serve the Lord, and I hope you will all be of the same mind." Here he resolves, *First*, For himself: *As for me, I will serve the Lord.* Note, The service of God is nothing below the greatest of men; it is so far from being a diminution and disparagement to princes and those of the first rank to be religious that it is their greatest honour, and adds the brightest crown of glory to them. Observe how positive he is: "I will serve God." It is no abridgment of our liberty to bind ourselves with a bond to God. *Secondly*, For his house, that is, his family,

his children and servants, such as were immediately under his eye and care, his inspection and influence. Joshua was a ruler, a judge in Israel, yet he did not make his necessary application to public affairs an excuse for the neglect of family religion. Those that have the charge of many families, as magistrates and ministers, must take special care of their own (1 Tim. iii. 4, 5): *I and my house will serve God.* 1. "Not my house, without me." He would not engage them to that work which he would not set his own hand to. As some who would have their children and servants good, but will not be so themselves; that is, they would have them go to heaven, but intend to go to hell themselves. 2. "Not I, without my house." He supposes he might be forsaken by his people, but in his house, where his authority was greater and more immediate, there he would over-rule. Note, When we cannot bring as many as we would to the service of God we must bring as many as we can, and extend our endeavours to the utmost sphere of our activity; if we cannot reform the land, let us put away iniquity far from our own tabernacle. 3. "First I, and then my house." Note, Those that lead and rule in other things should be first in the service of God, and go before in the best things. *Thirdly*, He resolves to do this whatever others did. Though all the families of Israel should revolt from God, and serve idols, yet Joshua and his family will stedfastly adhere to the God of Israel. Note, Those that resolve to serve God must not mind being singular in it, nor be drawn by the crowd to forsake his service. Those that are bound for heaven must be willing to swim against the stream, and must not do as the most do, but as the best do.

(2.) The matter being thus put to their choice, they immediately determine it by a free, rational, and intelligent declaration, for the God of Israel, against all competitors whatsoever, *v. 16—18.* Here, [1.] They concur with Joshua in his resolution, being influenced by the example of so great a man, who had been so great a blessing to them (*v. 18*): *We also will serve the Lord.* See how much good great men might do, if they were but zealous in religion, by their influence on their inferiors. [2.] They startle at the thought of apostatizing from God (*v. 16*): *God forbid*; the word intimates the greatest dread and detestation imaginable. "Far be it, far be it from us, that we or ours should ever forsake the Lord to serve other gods. We must be perfectly lost to all sense of justice, gratitude, and honour, ere we can harbour the least thought of such a thing." Thus must our hearts rise against all temptations to desert the service of God. *Get thee behind me, Satan.* [3.] They give very substantial reasons for their choice, to show that they did not make it purely in compliance to Joshua, but from a full conviction

of the reasonableness and equity of it. They make this choice for, and in consideration, *First*, Of the many great and very kind things God had done for them, bringing them out of Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan, *v. 17, 18.* Thus they repeat to themselves Joshua's sermon, and then express their sincere compliance with the intentions of it. *Secondly*, Of the relation they stood in to God, and his covenant with them "We will serve the Lord (*v. 18*), for he is our God, who has graciously engaged himself by promise to us, and to whom we have by solemn vow engaged ourselves."

2. He brings them to embrace their religion resolutely, and to express a full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. Now that he has them in a good mind he follows his blow, and drives the nail to the head, that it might, if possible, be a nail in a sure place. Fast bind, fast find.

(1.) In order to this he sets before them the difficulties of religion, and that in it which might be thought discouraging (*v. 19, 20*): *You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God*, or, as it is in the Hebrew, *he is the holy Gods*, intimating the mystery of the Trinity, three in one; *holy, holy, holy*, holy Father, holy Son, holy Spirit. *He will not forgive.* And, *if you forsake him, he will do you hurt.* Certainly Joshua does not intend hereby to deter them from the service of God as impracticable and dangerous. But, [1.] He perhaps intends to represent here the suggestions of seducers, who tempted Israel from their God, and from the service of him, with such insinuations as these, that he was a hard master, his work impossible to be done, and he not to be pleased, and, if displeased, implacable and revengeful,—that he would confine their respects to himself only, and would not suffer them to show the least kindness for any other,—and that herein he was very unlike the gods of the nations, which were easy, and neither holy nor jealous. It is probable that this was then commonly objected against the Jewish religion, as it has all along been the artifice of Satan ever since he tempted our first parents thus to misrepresent God and his laws, as harsh and severe; and Joshua by his tone and manner of speaking might make them perceive he intended it as an objection, and would put it to them how they would keep their ground against the force of it. Or, [2.] He thus expresses his godly jealousy over them, and his fear concerning them, that, notwithstanding the profession they now made of zeal for God and his service, they would afterwards draw back, and if they did they would find him just and jealous to avenge it. Or, [3.] He resolves to let them know the worst of it, and what strict terms they must expect to stand upon with God, that they might sit down and count the cost. "You cannot serve the Lord, except you put away all other gods,

for he is holy and jealous, and will by no means admit a rival, and therefore you must be very watchful and careful, for it is at your peril if you desert his service; better you had never known it." Thus, though our Master has assured us that *his yoke is easy*, yet lest, upon the presumption of this, we should grow remiss and careless, he has also told us that the gate is strait, and the way narrow, that leads to life, that we may therefore strive to enter, and not seek only. "You cannot serve God and Mammon; therefore, if you resolve to serve God, you must renounce all competitors with him. You cannot serve God in your own strength, nor will he forgive your transgressions for any righteousness of your own; but *all the seed of Israel must be justified and must glory in the Lord alone as their righteousness and strength*," Isa. xlv. 24, 25. They must therefore come off from all confidence in their own sufficiency, else their purposes would be to no purpose. Or, [4.] Joshua thus urges on them the seeming discouragements which lay in their way, that he might sharpen their resolutions, and draw from them a promise yet more express and solemn that they would continue faithful to God and their religion. He draws it from them that they might catch at it the more earnestly and hold it the faster.

(2.) Notwithstanding this statement of the difficulties of religion, they declare a firm and fixed resolution to continue and persevere therein (v. 21): "*Nay, but we will serve the Lord. We will think never the worse of him for his being a holy and jealous God, nor for his confining his servants to worship himself only. Justly will he consume those that forsake him, but we never will forsake him; not only we have a good mind to serve him, and we hope we shall, but we are at a point, we cannot bear to hear any entreaties to leave him or to turn from following after him* (Ruth i. 16); in the strength of divine grace we are resolved that we will serve the Lord." This resolution they repeat with an explication (v. 24): "*The Lord our God will we serve, not only be called his servants and wear his livery, but our religion shall rule us in every thing, and his voice will we obey.*" And in vain do we call him Master and Lord, if we do not the things which he saith, Luke vi. 46. This last promise they make in answer to the charge Joshua gave them (v. 23), that, in order to their perseverance, they should, [1.] Put away the images and relics of the strange gods, and not keep any of the tokens of those other lovers in their custody, if they resolved their *Maker should be their husband*; they promise, in this, to obey his voice. [2.] That they should *incline their hearts to the God of Israel*, use their authority over their own hearts to engage them for God, not only to set their affections upon him, but to settle them so. These terms they agree to, and thus, as Joshua explains

the bargain, they strike it: *The Lord our God will we serve.*

II. The service of God being thus made their deliberate choice, Joshua binds them to it by a solemn covenant, v. 25. Moses had twice publicly ratified this covenant between God and Israel, at Mount Sinai (Exod. xxiv.) and in the plains of Moab, Deut. xxix. 1. Joshua had likewise done it once (ch. viii. 31, &c.) and now the second time. It is here called a *statute* and an *ordinance*, because of the strength and perpetuity of its obligation, and because even this covenant bound them to no more than what they were antecedently bound to by the divine command. Now, to give it the formalities of a covenant, 1. He calls witnesses, no other than themselves (v. 22): *You are witnesses that you have chosen the Lord.* He promises himself that they would never forget the solemnities of this day; but, if hereafter they should break this covenant, he assures them that the professions and promises they had now made would certainly rise up in judgment against them and condemn them; and they agreed to it: "*We are witnesses; let us be judged out of our own mouths if ever we be false to our God.*" 2. He put it in writing, and inserted it, as we find it here, in the sacred canon: *He wrote it in the book of the law* (v. 26), in that original which was laid up in the side of the ark, and thence, probably, it was transcribed into the several copies which the princes had for the use of each tribe. There it was written, that their obligation to religion by the divine precept, and that by their own promise, might remain on record together. 3. He erected a memorandum of it, for the benefit of those who perhaps were not conversant with writings, v. 26, 27. *He set up a great stone under an oak*, as a monument of this covenant, and perhaps wrote an inscription upon it (by which stones are made to speak) signifying the intention of it. When he says, *It hath heard* what was past, he tacitly upbraids the people with the hardness of their hearts, as if this stone had heard to as good purpose as some of them; and, if they should forget what was now done, this stone would so far preserve the remembrance of it as to reproach them for their stupidity and carelessness, and be a witness against them.

The matter being thus settled, Joshua dismissed this assembly of the grandees of Israel (v. 28), and took his last leave of them, well satisfied in having done his part, by which he had delivered his soul; if they perished, their blood would be upon their own heads.

29 And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being a hundred and ten years old. 30



And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash. 31 And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel. 32 And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph. 33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim.

This book, which began with triumphs, here ends with funerals, by which all the glory of man is stained. We have here, 1. The burial of Joseph, v. 32. He died about 200 years before in Egypt, but gave commandment concerning his bones, that they should not rest in their grave until Israel had rest in the land of promise; now therefore the children of Israel, who had brought this coffin full of bones with them out of Egypt, carried it along with them in all their marches through the wilderness (the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, it is probable, taking particular care of it), and kept it in their camp till Canaan was perfectly reduced, now at last they deposited it in that piece of ground which his father gave him near Shechem, Gen. xlviii. 22. Probably it was upon this occasion that Joshua called for all Israel to meet him at Shechem (v. 1), to attend Joseph's coffin to the grave there, so that the sermon in this chapter served both for Joseph's funeral sermon and his own farewell sermon; and if it was, as is supposed, in the last year of his life, the occasion might very well remind him of his own death being at hand, for he was now just at the same age that his illustrious ancestor Joseph had arrived at when he died, 110 years old; compare v. 29 with Gen. i. 26. 2. The death and burial of Joshua, v. 29, 30. We are not told how long he lived after the coming of Israel into Canaan. Dr. Lightfoot thinks

it was about seventeen years; but the Jewish chronologers generally say it was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. He is here called the *servant of the Lord*, the same title that was given to Moses (ch. i. 1) when mention was made of his death; for, though Joshua was in many respects inferior to Moses, yet in this he was equal to him, that, according as his work was, he approved himself a diligent and faithful servant of God. And he that traded with his two talents had the same approbation that he had who traded with five. *Well done, good and faithful servant.* Joshua's burying-place is here said to be on the north side of the hill Gaash, or the quaking hill; the Jews say it was so called because it trembled at the burial of Joshua, to upbraid the people of Israel with their stupidity in that they did not lament the death of that great and good man as they ought to have done. Thus at the death of Christ, our Joshua, the earth quaked. The learned bishop Patrick observes that there is no mention of any days of mourning being observed for Joshua, as there were for Moses and Aaron, in which, he says, St. Hierom and others of the fathers think there is a mystery, namely, that under the law, when life and immortality were not brought to so clear a light as they are now, they had reason to mourn and weep for the death of their friends; but now that Jesus, our Joshua, has opened the kingdom of heaven, we may rather rejoice. 3. The death and burial of Eleazar the chief priest, who, it is probable, died about the same time that Joshua did, as Aaron in the same year with Moses, v. 33. The Jews say that Eleazar, a little before he died, called the elders together, and gave them a charge as Joshua had done. He was buried in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which came to him, not by descent, for then it would have pertained to his father first, nor had the priests any cities in Mount Ephraim, but either it fell to him by marriage, as the Jews conjecture, or it was freely bestowed upon him, to build a country seat on, by some pious Israelite that was well-affected to the priesthood, for it is here said to have been given him; and there he buried his dear father. 4. A general idea given us of the state of Israel at this time, v. 31. While Joshua lived, religion was kept up among them under his care and influence; but soon after he and his contemporaries died it went to decay, so much oftentimes does one head hold up. how well is it for the gospel church that Christ, our Joshua, is still with it, by his Spirit, and will be always, even unto the end of the world!

AN  
 EXPOSITION,  
 WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
 OF THE BOOK OF  
 J U D G E S.

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THIS is called in the Hebrew *Shepher Shoptim*, the *Book of Judges*, which the Syriac and Arabic versions enlarge upon, and call it, *The Book of the Judges of the Children of Israel*; the judgments of that nation being peculiar, so were their judges, whose office differed vastly from that of the judges of other nations. The LXX. entitle it only *Kpıraı, Judges*. It is the history of the *commonwealth of Israel*, during the government of the judges from Othniel to Eli, so much of it as God saw fit to transmit to us. It contains the history (according to Dr. Lightfoot's computation) of 299 years, reckoning to Othniel of Judah forty years, to Ebud of Benjamin eighty years, to Barak of Naphtali forty years, to Gideon of Manasseh forty years, to Abimelech his son three years, to Tola of Issachar twenty-three, to Jair of Manasseh twenty-two, to Jephtha of Manasseh six, to Ibzan of Judah seven, to Elon of Zebulun ten, to Abdon of Ephraim eight, to Samson of Dan twenty, in all 299. As for the years of their servitude, as where Eglon is said to oppress them eighteen years and Jabin twenty years, and so some others, those must be reckoned to fall in with some or other of the years of the judges. The judges here appear to have been of eight several tribes; that honour was thus diffused, until at last it centred in Judah. Eli and Samuel, the two judges that fall not within this book, were of Levi. It seems, there was no judge of Reuben or Simeon, Gad or Asher. The history of these judges in their order we have in this book to the end of *ch. xvi*. And then in the last five chapters we have an account of some particular memorable events which happened, as the story of Ruth did (*Ruth i. 1*) *in the days when the judges ruled*, but it is not certain in which judge's days; but they are put together at the end of the book, that the thread of the general history might not be interrupted. Now as to the state of the commonwealth of Israel during this period, I. They do not appear here either so great or so good as one might have expected the character of such a peculiar people would be, that were governed by such laws and enriched by such promises. We find them wretchedly corrupted, and wretchedly oppressed by their neighbours about them, and nowhere in all the book, either in war or council, do they make any figure proportionable to their glorious entry into Canaan. What shall we say to it? God would hereby show us the lamentable imperfection of all persons and things under the sun, that we may look for complete holiness and happiness in the other world, and not in this. Yet, II. We may hope that though the historian in this book enlarges most upon their provocations and grievances, yet there was a face of religion upon the land; and, however there were those among them that were drawn aside to idolatry, yet the tabernacle-service, according to the law of Moses, was kept up, and there were many that attended it. Historians record not the common course of justice and commerce in a nation, taking that for granted, but only the wars and disturbances that happen; but the reader must consider the other, to balance the blackness of them. III. It should seem that in these times each tribe had very much its government in ordinary within itself, and acted separately, without one common head, or council, which occasioned many differences among themselves, and kept them from being or doing any thing considerable. IV. The government of the judges was not constant, but occasional; when it is said that after Ehud's victory *the land rested eighty years*, and after Barak's *forty*, it is not certain that they lived, much less that they governed, so long; but they and the rest were raised up and animated by the Spirit of God to do particular service to the public when there was occasion, to *avenge Israel of their enemies*, and to purge Israel of their idolatries, which are the two things principally meant by their judging Israel. Yet Deborah, as a prophetess, was attended for judgment by all Israel, before there was occasion for her agency in war, *ch. iv. 4*. V. During the government of the judges, God was in a more especial manner Israel's king; so Samuel tells them when they were resolved to throw off this form of government, *1 Sam. xii. 12*. God would try what his own law and the constitutions of that would do to keep them in order, and it proved that when *there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes*; he therefore, towards the latter end of this time, made the government of the judges more constant and universal than it was at first, and at length gave them David, a king after his own heart; then, and not till then, Israel began to flourish, which should make us very thankful for magistrates both supreme and subordinate, for they are *ministers of God unto us for good*. Four of the judges of Israel are canonized (*Heb. xi. 32*), Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephtha. The learned bishop Patrick thinks the prophet Samuel was the penman of this Book.

## CHAP. I.

This chapter gives us a particular account what sort of progress the several tribes of Israel made in the reducing of Canaan after the death of Joshua. He did (as we say) break the neck of that great work, and put it into such a posture that they might easily have perfected it in one time, if they had not been wanting to themselves; what they did in order hereunto, and wherein they came short, we are told. 1. The united tribes of Judah and Simeon did bravely. 1. God appointed Judah to begin, ver. 1, 2. 2. Judah took Simeon to act in conjunction with him, ver. 3. 3. They succeeded in their enterprises against Bezek, (ver. 4-7) Jerusalem (ver. 8), Hebron and Debir (ver. 9-15), Hormah, Gaza, and other places, ver. 17-19. 4. Yet where there were chariots of iron their hearts failed them, ver. 19. Mention is made of the Kenites settling among them, ver. 16. II. The other tribes, in comparison with these, acted a cowardly part. 1. Benjamin failed, ver. 21. 2. The house of Joseph did well against Beth-el (ver. 22-26), but in other places did not improve their advantages, nor Manasseh (ver. 27, 28), nor Ephraim, ver. 29. 3. Zebulun spared the Canaanites, ver. 30. 4. Asher truckled worse than any of them to the Canaanites, ver. 31, 32. 5. Naphthali was kept out of the full possession of several of his cities, ver. 33. 6. Dan was straitened by the Amorites, ver. 34. No account is given of Issachar, nor of the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan.

**N**OW after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? 2 And the LORD said, Judah shall go up. behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. 3 And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. 4 And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. 5 And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. 7 And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered *their meat* under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died. 8 Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Here, I. The children of Israel consult the oracle of God for direction which of all the tribes should first attempt to clear their country of the Canaanites, and to animate and encourage the rest. It was *after the death of Joshua*. While he lived he directed them, and all the tribes were obedient to him, but when he died he left no successor in the same authority that he had; but the

people must consult the breast-plate of judgment, and thence receive the word of command; for God himself, as he was their King, so he was the Lord of their hosts. The question they ask is, *Who shall go up first?* v. 1. By this time, we may suppose, they were so multiplied that the places they were in possession of began to be too strait for them, and they must thrust out the enemy to make room; now they enquire who should first take up arms. Whether each tribe was ambitious of being first, and so strove for the honour of it, or whether each was afraid of being first, and so strove to decline it, does not appear; but by common consent the matter was referred to God himself, who is the fittest both to dispose of honours and to cut out work.

II. God appointed that Judah should go up first, and promised him success (v. 2): *"I have delivered the land into his hand, to be possessed, and therefore will deliver the enemy into his hand, that keeps him out of possession, to be destroyed."* And why must Judah be first in this undertaking? 1. Judah was the most numerous and powerful tribe, and therefore let Judah venture first. Note, God appoints service according to the strength he has given. Those that are most able, from them most work is expected. 2. Judah was first in dignity, and therefore must be first in duty. He it is whom *his brethren must praise*, and therefore he it is who must lead in perilous services. Let the burden of honour and the burden of work go together. 3. Judah was first served; the lot came up for Judah first, and therefore Judah must first fight. 4. Judah was the tribe out of which our Lord was to spring: so that in Judah, Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, went before them. Christ engaged the powers of darkness first, and foiled them, which animates us for our conflicts; and it is in him that we are *more than conquerors*. Observe, The service and the success are put together: *"Judah shall go up; let him do his part, and then he shall find that I have delivered the land into his hand."* His service will not avail unless God give the success; but God will not give the success unless he vigorously apply himself to the service.

III. Judah hereupon prepares to go up, but courts his brother and neighbour the tribe of Simeon (the lot of which tribe fell within that of Judah and was assigned out of it) to join forces with him, v. 3. Observe here, 1. That the strongest should not despise but desire the assistance even of those that are weaker. Judah was the most considerable of all the tribes, and Simeon the least considerable, and yet Judah begs Simeon's friendship, and prays an aid from him; the head cannot say to the foot, *I have no need of thee*, for we are *members one of another*. 2. Those that crave assistance must be ready to give assistance: *Come with me*

into my lot, and then I will go with thee into thine. It becomes Israelites to help one another against Canaanites; and all Christians, even those of different tribes, should strengthen one another's hands against the common interests of Satan's kingdom. Those who thus help one another in love have reason to hope that God will graciously help them both.

IV. The confederate forces of Judah and Simeon take the field: *Judah went up* (v. 4), and Simeon with him; v. 3. Caleb, it is probable, was commander-in-chief of this expedition; for who so fit as he who had both an old man's head and a young man's hand, the experience of age and the vigour of youth? Josh. xiv. 10, 11. It should seem too, by what follows (v. 10, 11), that he was not yet in possession of his own allotment. It was happy for them that they had such a general as, according to his name, was all heart. Some think that the Canaanites had got together into a body, a formidable body, when Israel consulted who should go and fight against them, and that they then began to stir when they heard of the death of Joshua, whose name had been so dreadful to them; but, if so, it proved they did but meddle to their own hurt.

V. God gave them great success. Whether they invaded the enemy, or the enemy first gave them the alarm, *the Lord delivered them into their hand*, v. 4. Though the army of Judah was strong and bold, yet the victory is attributed to God: he *delivered the Canaanites into their hand*; having given them authority, he here gives them ability to destroy them—put it in their power, and so tried their obedience to his command, which was *utterly to cut them off*. Bishop Patrick observes upon this that we meet not with such religious expressions in the heathen writers, concerning the success of their arms, as we have here and elsewhere in this sacred history. I wish such pious acknowledgments of the divine providence had not grown into disuse at this time with many that are called Christians. Now, 1. We are told how the army of the Canaanites was routed in the field, in or near Bezek, the place where they drew up, which afterwards Saul made the place of a general rendezvous (1 Sam. xi. 8); they slew 10,000 men, which blow, if followed, could not but be a very great weakening to those that were already brought so very low. 2. How their king was taken and mortified. His name was Adoni-bezek, which signifies, *lord of Bezek*. There have been those that called their lands by their own names (Ps. xlix. 11), but here was one (and there has been many another) that called himself by his land's name. He was taken prisoner after the battle, and we are here told how they used him; they cut off his thumbs, to disfit him for fighting, and his great toes, that he might not be able to run away, v. 6. It had been barbarous thus

to triumph over a man in misery, and that lay at their mercy, but that he was a devoted Canaanite, and one that had in like manner abused others, which probably they had heard of. Josephus says, "They cut off his hands and his feet," probably supposing those more likely to be mortal wounds than only the cutting off of his thumbs and his great toes. But this indignity which they did him extorted from him an acknowledgment of the righteousness of God, v. 7. Here observe, (1.) What a great man this Adoni-bezek had been, how great in the field, where armies fled before him, how great at home, where kings were set with the dogs of his flock; and yet now himself a prisoner, and reduced to the extremity of meanness and disgrace. See how changeable this world is, and how slippery its high places are. Let not the highest be proud, nor the strongest secure, for they know not how low they may be brought before they die. (2.) What desolations he had made among his neighbours: he had wholly subdued seventy kings, to such a degree as to have them his prisoners; he that was the chief person in a city was then called a *king*, and the greatness of their title did but aggravate their disgrace, and fired the pride of him that insulted over them.

We cannot suppose that Adoni-bezek had seventy of these petty princes at once his slaves; but first and last, in the course of his reign, he had thus deposed and abused so many, who perhaps were many of them kings of the same cities that successively opposed him, and whom he thus treated to please his own imperious barbarous fancy, and for a terror to others. It seems the Canaanites had been wasted by civil wars, and those bloody ones, among themselves, which would very much facilitate the conquest of them by Israel. "Judah," says Dr. Lightfoot, "in conquering Adoni-bezek, did, in effect, conquer seventy kings." (3.) How justly he was treated as he had treated others. Thus the righteous God sometimes, in his providence, makes the punishment to answer the sin, and observes an equality in his judgments; the spoiler shall be spoiled, and the treacherous dealer dealt treacherously with, Isa. xxxiii. 1. And those that *showed no mercy* shall have *no mercy shown* them, Jam. ii. 13. See Rev. xiii. 10; xviii. 6. (4.) How honestly he owned the righteousness of God herein: *As I have done, so God has requited me*. See the power of conscience, when God by his judgments awakens it, how it brings sin to remembrance, and subscribes to the justice of God. He that in his pride had set God at defiance now yields to him, and reflects with as much regret upon the kings under his table as ever he had looked upon them with pleasure when he had them there. He seems to own that he was better dealt with than he had dealt with his prisoners; for though the Israelites maimed him (according to the law of retaliation, an

*eye for an eye*, so a thumb for a thumb), yet they did not put him *under the table* to be fed with the crumbs there, because, though the other might well be looked upon as an act of justice, this would have savoured more of pride and haughtiness than did become an Israelite.

VI. Particular notice is taken of the conquest of Jerusalem, *v. 8*. Our translators judge it spoken of here as done formerly in Joshua's time, and only repeated on occasion of Adoni-bezek's dying there, and therefore read it, "they had fought against Jerusalem," and put this verse in a parenthesis; but the original speaks of it as a thing now done, and this seems most probable because it is said to be done by the children of Judah in particular, not by all Israel in general, whom Joshua commanded. Joshua indeed conquered and slew Adonizedec, king of Jerusalem (*Josh. x.*), but we read not there of his taking the city; probably, while he was pursuing his conquests elsewhere, this Adoni-bezek, a neighbouring prince, got possession of it, whom Israel having conquered in the field, the city fell into their hands, and they slew the inhabitants, except those who retreated into the castle and held out there till David's time, and they *set the city on fire*, in token of their detestation of the idolatry wherewith it had been deeply infected, yet probably not so utterly as to consume it, but to leave convenient habitations for as many as they had to put into the possession of it.

9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before *was Kirjath-arba*;) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi. 11 And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before *was Kirjath-sepher*: 12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 14 And it came to pass, when she came *to him*, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off *her ass*; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? 15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper

springs and the nether springs. 16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which *lieth* in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. 17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. 19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out *the inhabitants of the mountain*; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. 20 And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

We have here a further account of that glorious and successful campaign which Judah and Simeon made. 1. The lot of Judah was pretty well cleared of the Canaanites, yet not thoroughly. Those that *dwelt in the mountain* (the mountains that were round about Jerusalem) were driven out (*v. 9, 19*), but those in the valley kept their ground against them, having *chariots of iron*, such as we read of, *Josh. xvii. 16*. Here the men of Judah failed, and thereby spoiled the influence which otherwise their example hitherto might have had on the rest of the tribes, who followed them in this instance of their cowardice, rather than in all the other instances of their courage. They had iron chariots, and therefore it was thought not safe to attack them: but had not Israel God on their side, *whose chariots are thousands of angels* (*Ps. lxxviii. 17*), before whom these iron chariots would be but as stubble to the fire? Had not God expressly promised by the oracle (*v. 2*) to give them success against the Canaanites in this very expedition, without excepting those that had iron chariots? Yet they suffered their fears to prevail against their faith, they could not trust God under any disadvantages, and therefore durst not face the iron chariots, but meanly withdrew their forces, when with one bold stroke they might have completed their victories; and it proved of pernicious consequence. They did run well, what hindered them? *Gal. v. 7*. 2. Caleb was put in possession of Hebron, which, though given him by Joshua ten or twelve years before (as Dr. Lightfoot computes), yet being employed in

public service, for the settling of the tribes, which he preferred before his own private interests, it seems he did not till now make himself master of; so well content was that good man to serve others, while he left himself to be served last; few are like-minded, for all seek their own, Phil. ii. 20, 21. Yet now the men of Judah all came in to his assistance for the reducing of Hebron (r. 10), slew the sons of Anak, and put him in possession of it, r. 20. They gave Hebron unto Caleb. And now Caleb, that he might return the kindness of his countrymen, is impatient to see Debir reduced and put into the hands of the men of Judah, to expedite which he proffers his daughter to the person that will undertake to command in the siege of that important place, r. 11, 12. Othniel bravely undertakes it, and wins the town and the lady (r. 13), and by his wife's interest and management with her father gains a very good inheritance for himself and his family, r. 14, 15. We had this passage before, Josh. xv. 16—19, where it was largely explained and improved. 3. Simeon got ground of the Canaanites in his border, r. 17, 18. In the eastern part of Simeon's lot, they destroyed the Canaanites in Zephath, and called it *Hormoh*—*destruction*, adding this to some other devoted cities not far off, which they had some time ago, with good reason, called by that name, Num. xxi. 2, 3. And this perhaps was the complete performance of the vow they then made that they would utterly destroy these cities of the Canaanites in the south. In the western part they took Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, cities of the Philistines; they gained present possession of the cities, but, not destroying the inhabitants, the Philistines in process of time recovered the cities, and proved inveterate enemies to the Israel of God, and no better could come of doing their work by the halves. 4. The Kenites gained a settlement in the tribe of Judah, choosing it there rather than in any other tribe, because it was the strongest, and there they hoped to be safe and quiet, r. 16. These were the posterity of Jethro, who either went with Israel when Moses invited them (Num. x. 29) or met them about the same place when they came up from their wanderings in the wilderness thirty-eight years after, and went with them then to Canaan, Moses having promised them that they should fare as Israel fared, Num. x. 32. They had at first seated themselves in the city of *palm-trees*, that is, Jericho, a city which never was to be rebuilt, and therefore the fitter for those who dwell in tents, and did not mind building. But afterwards they removed into the wilderness of Judah, either out of their affection to that place, because solitary and retired, or out of their affection to that tribe, which perhaps had been in a particular manner kind to them. Yet we find the tent of Jael, who was of that family, far north, in the lot of Naphtali, when Sisera took shelter

there, ch. iv. 17. This respect Israel showed them, to let them fix where they pleased, being a quiet people, who, wherever they were, were content with a little. Those that molested none were molested by none. *Blessed are the meek, for thus they shall inherit the earth.*

21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day. 22 And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Beth-el: and the LORD was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Beth-el. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) 24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will show thee mercy. 25 And when he showed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family. 26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day. 27 Neither did Manassch drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. 28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. 29 Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. 30 Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. 31 Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aplik, nor of Rehob: 32 But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.

33 Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them. 34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: 35 But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalvim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. 36 And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabim, from the rock, and upward.

We are here told upon what terms the rest of the tribes stood with the Canaanites that remained.

I. Benjamin neglected to drive the Jebusites out of that part of the city of Jerusalem which fell to their lot, *v.* 21. Judah had set them a good example, and gained them great advantages by what they did (*v.* 9), but they did not follow the blow for want of resolution.

II. The house of Joseph,

1. Bestirred themselves a little to get possession of Beth-el, *v.* 22. That city is mentioned in the tribe of Benjamin, Josh. xviii. 22. Yet it is spoken of there (*v.* 13) as a city in the borders of that tribe, and, it should seem, the line went through it, so that one half of it only belonged to Benjamin, the other half to Ephraim; and perhaps the activity of the Ephraimites at this time, to recover it from the Canaanites, secured it entirely to them henceforward, or at least the greatest part of it, for afterwards we find it so much under the power of the ten tribes (and Benjamin was none of them) that Jeroboam set up one of his calves in it. In this account of the expedition of the Ephraimites against Beth-el observe,

(1.) Their interest in the divine favour: *The Lord was with them*, and would have been with the other tribes if they would have exerted their strength. The Chaldee reads it here, as in many other places, *The Word of the Lord was their helper*, namely, Christ himself, the captain of the Lord's host, now that they acted separately, as well as when they were all in one body.

(2.) The prudent measures they took to gain the city. They sent spies to observe what part of the city was weakest, or which way they might make their attack with most advantage, *v.* 23. These spies got very good information from a man they providentially met with, who showed them a private way into the town, which was left unguarded because, being not generally known, no danger was

suspected on that side. And here, [1.] He is not to be blamed for giving them this intelligence if he did it from a conviction that *the Lord was with them*, and that by his donation the land was theirs of right, any more than Rahab was for entertaining those whom she knew to be enemies of her country, but friends of God. Nor, [2.] Are those to be blamed who *showed him mercy*, gave him and his family not only their lives, but liberty to go wherever they pleased: for one good turn requires another. But, it seems, he would not join himself to the people of Israel, he feared them rather than loved them, and therefore he removed after a colony of the Hittites, which, it should seem, had gone into Arabia and settled there upon Joshua's invasion of the country; with them this man chose to dwell, and among them he built a city, a small one, we may suppose, such as planters commonly build, and in the name of it preserved the ancient name of his native city, *Luz, an almond-tree*, preferring this before its new name, which carried religion in it, *Bethel—the house of God*.

(3.) Their success. The spies brought or sent notice of the intelligence they had gained to the army, which improved their advantages, surprised the city, and put them all to the sword, *v.* 25. But,

2. Besides this achievement, it seems, the children of Joseph did nothing remarkable (1.) Manasseh failed to drive out the Canaanites from several very considerable cities in their lot, and did not make any attempt upon them, *v.* 27. But the Canaanites, being in possession, were resolved not to quit it; they would dwell in that land, and Manasseh had not resolution enough to offer to dispossess them; as if there was no meddling with them unless they were willing to resign, which it was not to be expected they ever would be. Only as Israel got strength they got ground, and served themselves, both by their contributions and by their personal services, *v.* 28, 35. (2.) Ephraim likewise, though a powerful tribe, neglected Gezer a considerable city, and suffered the Canaanites to *dwell among them* (*v.* 29), which, some think, intimates their allowing them a quiet settlement, and indulging them with the privileges of an unconquered people, not so much as making them tributaries.

III. Zebulun, perhaps inclining to the sea-trade, for it was foretold that it should be a haven for ships, neglected to reduce Kitron and Nahalol (*v.* 30), and only made the inhabitants of those places tributaries to them.

IV. Asher quitted itself worse than any of the tribes (*v.* 31, 32), not only in leaving more towns than any of them in the hands of the Canaanites, but in submitting to the Canaanites instead of making them tributaries; for so the manner of expression intimates, that the Asherites dwelt among the

Canaanites, as if the Canaanites were the more numerous and the more powerful, would still be lords of the country, and the Israelites must be only upon sufferance among them.

V. Naphtali also permitted the Canaanites to live among them (v. 33), only by degrees they got them so far under as to exact contributions from them.

VI. Dan was so far from extending his conquests where his lot lay that, wanting spirit to make head against the Amorites, he was forced by them to retire into the mountains and inhabit the cities there, but durst not venture into the valley, where, it is probable, the chariots of iron were, v. 34. Nay, and some of the cities in the mountains were kept against them, v. 35. Thus were they straitened in their possessions, and forced to seek for more room at Laish, a great way off, ch. xviii. 1, &c. In Jacob's blessing Judah is compared to a lion, Dan to a serpent; now observe how Judah with his lion-like courage prospered and prevailed, but Dan with all his serpentine subtlety could get no ground; craft and artful management do not always effect the wonders they pretend to. What Dan came short of doing, it seems, his neighbours the Ephraimites in part did for him; they put the Amorites under tribute, v. 35.

Upon the whole matter it appears that the people of Israel were generally very careless both of their duty and interest in this thing; they did not what they might have done to expel the Canaanites and make room for themselves. And, 1. It was owing to their slothfulness and cowardice. They would not be at the pains to complete their conquests; like the sluggard, that dreamed of a lion in the way, a lion in the streets, they fancied insuperable difficulties, and frightened themselves with winds and clouds from sowing and reaping. 2. It was owing to their covetousness; the Canaanites' labour and money would do them more good (they thought) than their blood, and therefore they were willing to let them live among them, that they might make a hand of them. 3. They had not that dread and detestation of idolatry which they ought to have had; they thought it a pity to put these Canaanites to the sword, though the measure of their iniquity was full, thought it would be no harm to let them live among them, and that they should be in no danger from them. 4. The same thing that kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan kept them now out of the full possession of it, and that was unbelief. Distrust of the power and promise of God lost them their advantages, and ran them into a thousand mischiefs.

#### \* CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. A particular message which God sent to Israel by an angel, and the impression it made upon them, ver. 1—8. II. A general idea of the state of Israel during the government of the judges, in which observe, 1. Their adherence to God while Joshua and the elders lived, ver. 6—10. 2. Their revolt afterwards to idolatry, ver. 11—13. 3. God's displeasure against them, and his judgments upon them for it, ver. 14, 15.

4. His pity towards them, shown in raising them up deliverers, ver. 16—18. 5. Their relapse into idolatry after the judgment was over, ver. 17—19. 6. The full stop God to anger put to their success, ver. 20—23. These are the contents, not only of this chapter, but of the whole book.

AND an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? 3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4 And it came to pass when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5 And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

It was the privilege of Israel that they had not only a law in general sent them from heaven, once for all, to direct them into and keep them in the way of happiness, but that they had particular messages sent them from heaven, as there was occasion, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, when at any time they turned aside out of that way. Besides the written word which they had before them to read, they often heard a word behind them, saying, *This is the way*, Isa. xxx. 21. Here begins that way of God's dealing with them. When they would not hear Moses, let it be tried whether they will hear the prophets. In these verses we have a very awakening sermon that was preached to them when they began to cool in their religion.

I. The preacher was an *angel of the Lord* (v. 1), not a prophet, not Phinehas, as the Jews conceit; gospel ministers are indeed called *angels of the churches*, but the Old-Testament prophets are never called *angels of the Lord*; no doubt this was a messenger from heaven. Such extraordinary messengers we sometimes find in this book employed in the raising up of the judges that delivered Israel, as Gideon and Samson; and now, to show how various are the good offices they do for God's Israel, here is one sent to preach to them, to prevent their falling into sin and trouble. This extraordinary messenger was sent to command, if possible, the greater regard to the message, and to affect the minds of a people whom nothing seemed to affect but what was sensible. The learned bishop Patrick is



clearly of opinion that this was not a created angel, but the Angel of the covenant, the same that appeared to Joshua as *captain of the hosts of the Lord*, who was God himself. Christ himself, says Dr. Lightfoot; who but God and Christ could say, *I made you to go up out of Egypt?* Joshua had lately admonished them to take heed of entangling themselves with the Canaanites, but they regarded not the words of a dying man; the same warning therefore is here brought them by the living God himself, the Son of God appearing as an angel. If they slight his servants, surely they will reverence his Son. This angel of the Lord is said to come up from Gilgal, perhaps not walking on the earth, but flying swiftly, as the angel Gabriel did to Daniel, in the open firmament of heaven; but, whether walking or flying, he seemed to come from Gilgal for a particular reason. Gilgal was long their headquarters after they came into Canaan, many signal favours they had there received from God, and there the covenant of circumcision was renewed (Mic. vi. 5), of all which it was designed they should be reminded by his coming from Gilgal. The remembrance of *what we have received and heard* will prepare us for a warning to hold fast, Rev. iii. 2, 3.

II. The persons to whom this sermon was preached were *all the children of Israel*, v. 4. A great congregation for a great preacher! They were assembled either for war, each tribe sending in its forces for some great expedition, or rather for worship, and then the place of their meeting must be Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, at which they were all to come together three times a year. When we attend upon God in instituted ordinances we may expect to hear from him, and to receive his gifts at his own gates. The place is called *Bochim* (v. 1), because it gained that name upon this occasion. All Israel needed the reproof and warning here given, and therefore it is spoken to them all.

III. The sermon itself is short, but very close. God here tells them plainly, 1. What he had done for them, v. 1. He had brought them out of Egypt, a land of slavery and toil, into Canaan, a land of rest, liberty, and plenty. The miseries of the one served as a foil to the felicities of the other. God had herein been kind to them, true to the oath sworn to their fathers, had given such proofs of his power as left them inexcusable if they distrusted it, and such engagements to his service as left them inexcusable if they deserted it. 2. What he had promised them: *I said, I will never break my covenant with you.* When he took them to be his peculiar people, it was not with any design to cast them off again, or to change them for another people at his pleasure; let them but be faithful to him, and they should find him unchangeably constant to them. He told them plainly that the covenant he entered into with them should never break, unless it

broke on their side. 3. What were his just and reasonable expectations from them (v. 2): that being taken into covenant with God they should make no league with the Canaanites, who were both his enemies and theirs,—that having set up his altar they should throw down their altars, lest they should be a temptation to them to serve their gods. Could any thing be demanded more easy? 4. How they had in this very thing which he had most insisted on, disobeyed him: “But you have not in so small a matter obeyed my voice.” In contempt of their covenant with God, and their confederacy with each other in that covenant, they made leagues of friendship with the idolatrous devoted Canaanites, and connived at their altars, though they stood in competition with God’s. *Why have you done this?* What account can you give of this perverseness of yours at the bar of right reason? What apology can you make for yourselves, or what excuse can you offer? Those that throw off their communion with God, and have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, know not what they do now, and will have nothing to say for themselves in the day of account shortly. 5. How they must expect to smart by and by for this their folly, v. 3. Their tolerating the Canaanites among them would, (1.) Put a period to their victories: “You will not drive them out,” says God, “and therefore I will not;” thus their sin was made their punishment. Thus those who indulge their lusts and corruptions, which they should mortify, forfeit the grace of God, and it is justly withdrawn from them. If we will not resist the devil, we cannot expect that God should tread him under our feet. (2.) It would involve them in continual troubles. “They shall be thorns in your sides to gore you, which way soever you turn, always doing you one mischief or other.” Those deceive themselves who expect advantage by friendship with those that are enemies to God. (3.) It would (which was worst of all) expose them to constant temptation and draw them to sin. “Their gods” (their *abominations*, so the Chaldee) “will be a snare to you; you will find yourselves wretchedly entangled in an affection to them, and it will be your ruin,” so some read it. Those that approach sin are justly left to themselves to fall into sin and to perish in it. God often makes men’s sin their punishment; and thorns and snares are *in the way of the froward*, who will walk contrary to God.

IV. The good success of this sermon is very remarkable: The people *lifted up their voice and wept*, v. 4. 1. The angel had told them of their sins, for which they thus expressed their sorrow: they lifted up their voice in confession of sin, crying out against their own folly and ingratitude, and wept, as those that were both ashamed of themselves and angry at themselves, as having acted so

directly contrary both to their reason and to their interest. 2. The angel had threatened them with the judgments of God, of which they thus expressed their dread: they lifted up their voice in prayer to God to turn away his wrath from them, and wept for fear of that wrath. They relented upon this alarm, and their hearts melted within them, and trembled at the word, and not without cause. This was good, and a sign that the word they heard made an impression upon them: it is a wonder sinners can ever read their bibles with dry eyes. But this was not enough: they wept, but we do not find that they reformed, that they went home and destroyed all the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the word that harden again before they are cast into a new mould. However, this general weeping, (1.) Gave a new name to the place (v. 5): they called it *Bochim*, *Weepers*, a good name for our religious assemblies to answer. Had they kept close to God and their duty, no voice but that of singing would have been heard in their congregation; but by their sin and folly they had made other work for themselves, and now nothing is to be heard but the voice of weeping. (2.) It gave occasion for a solemn sacrifice: They sacrificed there unto the Lord, having (as is supposed) met at Shiloh, where God's altar was. They offered sacrifice to turn away God's wrath, and to obtain his favour, and in token of their dedication of themselves to him, and to him only, making a covenant by this sacrifice. The disease being thus taken in time, and the physic administered working so well, one would have hoped a cure might be effected. But by the sequel of the story it appears to have been too deeply rooted to be wept out.

6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. 7 And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. 8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old. 9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. 11 And the children of

Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: 12 And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. 13 And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. 14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. 15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. 16 Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. 17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord: but they did not so. 18 And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. 19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. 20 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; 21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from

before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: 22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. 23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

The beginning of this paragraph is only a repetition of what account we had before of the people's good character during the government of Joshua, and of his death and burial (Josh. xxiv. 29, 30), which comes in here again only to make way for the following account, which this chapter gives, of their degeneracy and apostasy. The angel had foretold that the Canaanites and their idols would be a snare to Israel; now the historian undertakes to show that they were so, and, that this may appear the more clear, he looks back a little, and takes notice, 1. Of their happy settlement in the land of Canaan. Joshua, having distributed this land among them, dismissed them to the quiet and comfortable possession of it (v. 6): *He sent them away, not only every tribe, but every man to his inheritance, no doubt giving them his blessing.* 2. Of their continuance in the faith and fear of God's holy name as long as Joshua lived, v. 7. As they went to their possessions with good resolutions to cleave to God, so they persisted for some time in these good resolutions, as long as they had good rulers that set them good examples, gave them good instructions, and reprov'd and restrained the corruptions that crept in among them, and as long as they had fresh in remembrance the great things God did for them when he brought them into Canaan: those that had seen these wonders had so much sense as to believe their own eyes, and so much reason as to serve that God who had appeared so gloriously on their behalf; but those that followed, because they had not seen, believed not. 3. Of the death and burial of Joshua, which gave a fatal stroke to the interests of religion among the people, v. 8, 9. Yet so much sense they had of their obligations to him that they did him honour at his death, and buried him in *Tinnath-heres*; so it is called here, not, as in Joshua, *Tinnath-serah*. *Heres* signifies the sun, a representation of which, some think, was set upon his sepulchre, and gave name to it, in remembrance of the sun's standing still at his word. So divers of the Jewish writers say; but I much question whether an image of the sun would be allowed to the honour of Joshua at that time, when, by reason of men's general proneness to worship the sun, it would be in danger of being abused to the dishonour of God. 4. Of the rising of a new generation, v. 10. All that generation in a few years

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wore off, their good instructions and examples died and were buried with them, and there arose another generation of Israelites who had so little sense of religion, and were in so little care about it, that, notwithstanding all the advantages of their education, one might truly say that they knew not the Lord, knew him not aright, knew him not as he had revealed himself, else they would not have forsaken him. They were so entirely devoted to the world, so intent upon the business of it or so indulgent of the flesh in ease and luxury, that they never minded the true God and his holy religion, and so were easily drawn aside to false gods and their abominable superstitions.

And so he comes to give us a general idea of the series of things in Israel during the time of the judges, the same repeated in the same order.

1. The people of Israel forsook the God of Israel, and gave that worship and honour to the dunghill deities of the Canaanites which was due to him alone. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth! Hath a nation, such a nation, so well fed, so well taught, changed its God, such a God, a God of infinite power, unspotted purity, inexhaustible goodness, and so very jealous of a competitor, for stocks and stones that could do neither good nor evil? Jer. ii. 11, 12.* Never was there such an instance of folly, ingratitude, and perfidiousness. Observe how it is described here, v. 11—13. In general, *they did evil, nothing could be more evil, that is, more provoking to God, nor more prejudicial to themselves, and it was in the sight of the Lord; all evil is before him, but he takes special notice of the sin of having any other god. In particular, 1. They forsook the Lord (v. 12, and again v. 13); this was one of the two great evils they were guilty of, Jer. ii. 13. They had been joined to the Lord in covenant, but now they forsook him, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband. "They forsook the worship of the Lord," so the Chaldee: for those that forsake the worship of God do in effect forsake God himself. It aggravated this that he was the God of their fathers, so that they were born in his house, and therefore bound to serve him; and that he brought them out of the land of Egypt, he loosed their bonds, and upon that account also they were obliged to serve him. 2. When they forsook the only true God they did not turn atheists, nor were they such fools as to say, *There is no God; but they followed other gods: so much remained of pure nature as to own a God, yet so much appeared of corrupt nature as to multiply gods, and take up with any, and to follow the fashion, not the rule, in religious worship. Israel had the honour of being a peculiar people and dignified above all others, and yet so false were they to their own privileges that they were fond of the gods of the people that were round about them. Baal and Ashtaroth, he-gods**

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and she-gods; they made their court to sun and moon, Jupiter and Juno. *Baalim* signifies lords, and *Ashtaroth blessed ones*, both plural, for when they forsook Jehovah, who is one, they had gods many and lords many, as a luxuriant fancy pleased to multiply them. Whatever they took for their gods, they served them and bowed down to them, gave honour to them and begged favours from them.

II. The God of Israel was hereby provoked to anger, and delivered them up into the hand of their enemies, *v.* 14, 15. He was wroth with them, for he is a jealous God and true to the honour of his own name; and the way he took to punish them for their apostasy was to make those their tormentors whom they yielded to as their tempters. They made themselves as mean and miserable by forsaking God as they would have been great and happy if they had continued faithful to him. 1. The scale of victory turned against them. After they forsook God, whenever they took the sword in hand they were as sure to be beaten as before they had been sure to conquer. Formerly their enemies could not stand before them, but, wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was for them; when they began to cool in their religion, God suspended his favour, stopped the progress of their successes, and would not drive out their enemies any more (*v.* 3), only suffered them to keep their ground; but now, when they had quite revolted to idolatry, the war turned directly against them, and they *could not any longer stand before their enemies*. God would rather give the success to those that had never known nor owned him than to those that had done both, but had now deserted him. Wherever they went, they might perceive that God himself had turned to be their enemy, and fought against them, *Isa.* lxiii. 10. 2. The balance of power then turned against them of course. Whoever would might spoil them, whoever would might oppress them. God sold them into the hands of their enemies; not only he delivered them up freely, as we do that which we have sold, but he did it upon a valuable consideration, that he might get himself honour as a jealous God, who would not spare even his own peculiar people when they provoked him. He sold them as insolvent debtors are sold (*Matt.* xviii. 25), by their sufferings to make some sort of reparation to his glory for the injury it sustained by their apostasy. Observe how their punishment, (1.) Answered what they had done. They served the gods of the nations that were round about them, even the meanest, and God made them serve the princes of the nations that were round about them, even the meanest. He that is company for every fool is justly made a fool of by every company. (2.) How it answered what God had spoken. The hand of heaven was thus turned against them, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn (*v.* 15), referring

to the curse and death set before them in the covenant, with the blessing and life. Those that have found God true to his promises may thence infer that he will be as true to his threatenings.

III. The God of infinite mercy took pity on them in their distresses, though they had brought themselves into them by their own sin and folly, and wrought deliverance for them. Nevertheless, though their trouble was the punishment of their sin and the accomplishment of God's word, yet they were in process of time saved out of their trouble, *v.* 16—18. Here observe, 1. The inducement of their deliverance. It came purely from God's pity and tender compassion; the reason was fetched from within himself. It is not said, *It repented them because of their iniquities* (for it appears, *v.* 17, that many of them continued unreformed), but, *It repented the Lord because of their groanings*; though it is not so much the burden of sin as the burden of affliction that they are said to groan under. It is true they deserved to perish for ever under his curse, yet, this being the day of his patience and our probation, he does not stir up all his wrath. He might in justice have abandoned them, but he could not for pity do it. 2. The instruments of their deliverance. God did not send angels from heaven to rescue them, nor bring in any foreign power to their aid, but raised up judges from among themselves, as there was occasion, men to whom God gave extraordinary qualifications for, and calls to, that special service for which they were designed, which was to reform and deliver Israel, and whose great attempts he crowned with wonderful success: *The Lord was with the judges* when he raised them up, and so they became saviours. Observe, (1.) In the days of the greatest degeneracy and distress of the church there shall be some whom God will either find or make fit to redress its grievances and set things to rights. (2.) God must be acknowledged in the seasonable rising up of useful men for public service. He endues men with wisdom and courage, gives them hearts to act and venture. All that are in any way the blessings of their country must be looked upon as the gifts of God. (3.) Whom God calls he will own, and give them his presence; whom he raises up he will be with. (4.) The judges of a land are its saviours.

IV. The degenerate Israelites were not effectually and thoroughly reformed, no, not by their judges, *v.* 17—19. 1. Even while their judges were with them, and active in the work of reformation, there were those that *would not hearken to their judges*, but at that very time went a whoring after other gods, so mad were they upon their idols, and so obstinately bent to backslide. They had been espoused to God, but broke the marriage-covenant, and went a whoring after these gods. Idolatry is spiritual adultery,

so vile, and base, and perfidious a thing is it, and so hardly are those reclaimed that are addicted to it. 2. Those that in the times of reformation began to amend yet turned quickly out of the way again, and became as bad as ever. The way they turned out of was that which their godly ancestors walked in, and set them out in; but they soon started from under the influence both of their fathers' good example and of their own good education. The wicked children of godly parents do so, and will therefore have a great deal to answer for. However, when the judge was dead, they looked upon the dam which checked the stream of their idolatry as removed, and then it flowed down again with so much the more fury, and the next age seemed to be rather the worse for the attempts that had been made towards reformation, v. 19. They corrupted themselves more than their fathers, strove to outdo them in multiplying strange gods and inventing profane and impious rites of worship, as it were in contradiction to their reformers. They ceased not from, or, as the word is, they would not let fall, any of their own doings, grew not ashamed of those idolatrous services that were most odious nor weary of those that were most barbarous, would not so much as diminish one step of their hard and stubborn way. Thus those that have forsaken the good ways of God, which they have once known and professed, commonly grow most daring and desperate in sin, and have their hearts most hardened.

V. God's just resolution hereupon was still to continue the rod over them, 1. Their sin was sparing the Canaanites, and this in contempt and violation of the covenant God had made with them and the commands he had given them, v. 20. 2. Their punishment was that the Canaanites were spared, and so they were beaten with their own rod. They were not all delivered into the hand of Joshua while he lived, v. 23. Our Lord Jesus, though he spoiled principalities and powers, yet did not complete his victory at first. We see not yet all things put under him; there are remains of Satan's interest in the church, as there were of the Canaanites in the land: but our Joshua lives for ever, and will in the great day perfect his conquest. After Joshua's death, little was done for a long time against the Canaanites: Israel indulged them, and grew familiar with them, and therefore God would not drive them out any more, v. 21. If they will have such inmates as these among them, let them take them, and see what will come of it. God chose their delusions, Isa. lxvi. 4. Thus men cherish and indulge their own corrupt appetites and passions, and, instead of mortifying them, make provision for them, and therefore God justly leaves them to themselves under the power of their sins, which will be their ruin.

So shall their doom be; they themselves have decided it. These remnants of the Canaanites were left to prove Israel (v. 22), whether they would keep the way of the Lord or not; not that God might know them, but that they might know themselves. It was to try, (1.) Whether they could resist the temptations to idolatry which the Canaanites would lay before them. God had told them they could not, Dent. vii. 4. But they thought they could. "Well," said God, "I will try you;" and, upon trial, it was found that the tempters' charms were far too strong for them. God has told us how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts are, but we are not willing to believe it till by making bold with temptation we find it too true by sad experience. (2.) Whether they would make a good use of the vexations which the remaining natives would give them, and the many troubles they would occasion them, and would thereby be convinced of sin and humbled for it, reformed, and driven to God and their duty, whether by continual alarms from them they would be kept in awe and made afraid of provoking God.

## CHAP. III.

In this chapter, 1. A general account of Israel's enemies is premised, and of the mischief they did them, ver. 1-7. 11. A particular account of the brave exploits done by the first three of the judges. 1. Othniel, whom God raised up to fight Israel's battles, and plead their cause against the king of Mesopotamia, ver. 8-11. 2. Ehud, who was employed in rescuing Israel out of the hands of the Moabites, and did it by stabbing the king of Moab, ver. 12-20. 3. Shamgar, who signalized himself in an encounter with the Philistines, ver. 31.

**N**OW these are the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; 2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; 3 Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath. 4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. 5 And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: 6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. 7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

We are here told what remained of the old inhabitants of Canaan. 1. There were some of them that kept together in united bodies, unbroken (r. 3): *The five lords of the Philistines*, namely, Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, and Ekron, 1 Sam. vi. 17. Three of these cities had been in part reduced (ch. i. 18), but it seems the Philistines (probably with the help of the other two, which strengthened their confederacy with each other thenceforward) recovered the possession of them. These gave the greatest disturbance to Israel of any of the natives, especially in the latter times of the judges, and they were never quite reduced until David's time. There was a particular nation called *Canaanites*, that kept their ground with the Sidonians, upon the coast of the great sea. And in the north the Hivites held much of Mount Lebanon, it being a remote corner, in which perhaps they were supported by some of the neighbouring states. But, besides these, 2. There were every where in all parts of the country some scatterings of the nations (r. 5), Hittites, Amorites, &c., which, by Israel's foolish connivance and indulgence, were so many, so easy, and so insolent, that the *children of Israel* are said to dwell among them, as if the right had still remained in the Canaanites, and the Israelites had been taken in by their permission and only as tenants at will.

Now concerning these remnants of the natives observe,

I. How wisely God permitted them to remain. It is mentioned in the close of the foregoing chapter as an act of God's justice, that he let them remain for Israel's correction. But here another construction is put upon it, and it appears to have been an act of God's wisdom, that he let them remain for Israel's real advantage, that those who had not known the wars of Canaan might learn war, r. 1, 2. It was the will of God that the people of Israel should be inured to war, 1. Because their country was exceedingly rich and fruitful, and abounded with dainties of all sorts, which, if they were not sometimes made to know hardship, would be in danger of sinking them into the utmost degree of luxury and effeminacy. They must sometimes wade in blood, and not always in milk and honey, lest even their men of war, by the long disuse of arms, should become as soft and as nice as the tender and delicate woman, that would not set so much as the sole of her foot to the ground for tenderness and delicacy, a temper as destructive to every thing that is good as it is to every thing that is great, and therefore to be carefully watched against by all God's Israel. 2. Because their country lay very much in the midst of enemies, by whom they must expect to be insulted, for God's heritage was as a speckled bird; the birds round about were against her, Jer. xii. 9. It was therefore necessary they should be well dis-

ciplined, that they might defend their coasts when invaded, and might hereafter enlarge their coast as God had promised them. The art of war is best learnt by experience, which not only acquaints men with martial discipline, but (which is no less necessary) inspires them with a martial disposition. It was for the interest of Israel to breed soldiers, as it is the interest of an island to breed seamen, and therefore God left Canaanites among them, that, by the less difficulties and hardships they met with in encountering them, they might be prepared for greater, and, by running with the footmen, might learn to contend with horses, Jer. xii. 5. Israel was a figure of the church militant, that must fight its way to a triumphant state. The soldiers of Christ must endure hardness, 2 Tim. ii. 3. Corruption is therefore left remaining in the hearts even of good Christians, that they may learn war, may keep on the whole armour of God, and stand continually upon their guard. The learned bishop Patrick offers another sense of r. 2: *That they might know to teach them war*, that is, they shall know what it is to be left to themselves. Their fathers fought by a divine power. God taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight; but now that they have forfeited his favour let them learn what it is to fight like other men.

II. How wickedly Israel mingled themselves with those that did remain. One thing God intended in leaving them among them was to prove Israel (r. 4), that those who were faithful to the God of Israel might have the honour of resisting the Canaanites' allurements to idolatry, and that those who were false and insincere might be discovered, and might fall under the shame of yielding to those allurements. Thus in the Christian churches there must needs be heresies, that those who are perfect may be made manifest, 1 Cor. xi. 19. Israel, upon trial, proved bad. 1. They joined in marriage with the Canaanites (r. 6), though they could not advance either their honour or their estate by marrying with them. They would mar their blood instead of mending it, and sink their estates instead of raising them, by such marriages. 2. Thus they were brought to join in worship with them; they served their gods (r. 6), *Baalim and the groves* (r. 7), that is, the images that were worshipped in groves of thick trees, which were a sort of natural temples. In such unequal matches there is more reason to fear that the bad will corrupt the good than to hope that the good will reform the bad, as there is in laying two pears together, the one rotten and the other sound. When they inclined to worship other gods they forgot the Lord their God. In complaisance to their new relations, they talked of nothing but Baalim and the groves, so that by degrees they lost the remembrance of the true God, and forgot there was such a Being, and what obligations they lay under to him. In nothing is the corrupt memory of man more

treacherous than in this, that it is apt to forget God; because out of sight, he is out of mind; and here begins all the wickedness that is in the world: they *have perverted their way*, for they have *forgotteu the Lord their God*.

8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years. 9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother*. 10 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim. II And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

We now come to the records of the government of the particular judges, the first of which was Othniel, in whom the story of this book is knit to that of Joshua, for even in Joshua's time Othniel began to be famous, by which it appears that it was not long after Israel's settlement in Canaan before their purity began to be corrupted and their peace (by consequence) disturbed. And those who have taken pains to enquire into the sacred chronology are generally agreed that the Danites' idolatry, and the war with the Benjamites for abusing the Levite's concubine, though related in the latter end of this book, happened about this time, under or before the government of Othniel, who, though a judge, was not such a king in Israel as would keep men from doing what was *right in their own eyes*. In this short narrative of Othniel's government we have,

I. The distress that Israel was brought into for their sin, *v. 8*. God being justly displeased with them for plucking up the hedge of their peculiarity, and laying themselves in common with the nations, plucked up the hedge of their protection and laid them open to the nations, set them to sale as goods he would part with, and the first that laid hands on them was Chushan-rishathaim, king of that Syria which lay between the two great rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, thence called *Mesopotamia*, which signifies *in the midst of rivers*. It is probable that this was a warlike prince, and, aiming to enlarge his dominions, he invaded the two tribes first on the other side Jordan that lay next him, and afterwards, perhaps by degrees, penetrated into the heart of the country, and as far as

he went put them under contribution, exacting it with rigour, and perhaps quartering soldiers upon them. Laban, who oppressed Jacob with a hard service, was of this country; but it lay at such a distance that one could not have thought Israel's trouble would come from such a far country, which shows so much the more of the hand of God in it.

II. Their return to God in this distress: *When he slew them, then they sought him* whom before they had slighted. The *children of Israel*, even the generality of them, *cried unto the Lord, v. 9*. At first they made light of their trouble, and thought they could easily shake off the yoke of a prince at such a distance; but, when it continued eight years, they began to feel the smart of it, and then those cried under it who before had laughed at it. Those who in the day of their mirth had cried to Baalim and Ashtaroth now that they are in trouble cry to the Lord from whom they had revolted, whose justice brought them into this trouble, and whose power and favour could alone help them out of it. Affliction makes those cry to God with importunity who before would scarcely speak to him.

III. God's return in mercy to them for their deliverance. Though need drove them to him, he did not therefore reject their prayers, but graciously raised up a deliverer, or *saviour*, as the word is. Observe, 1. Who the deliverer was. It was Othniel, who married Caleb's daughter, one of the old stock that had *seen the works of the Lord*, and had himself, no question, kept his integrity, and secretly lamented the apostasy of his people, but waited for a divine call to appear publicly for the redress of their grievances. He was now, we may suppose, far advanced in years, when God raised him up to this honour, but the decays of age were no hindrance to his usefulness when God had work for him to do. 2. Whence he had his commission, not of man, nor by man; but *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (v. 10)*, the spirit of wisdom and courage to qualify him for the service, and a spirit of power to excite him to it, so as to give him and others full satisfaction that it was the will of God he should engage in it. The Chaldee says, *The spirit of prophecy remained on him*. 3. What method he took. He first judged Israel, reproved them, called them to an account for their sins, and reformed them, and then went out to war. This was the right method. Let sin at home be conquered, that worst of enemies, and then enemies abroad will be the more easily dealt with. Thus let Christ be our Judge and Law-giver, and then *he will save us*, and on no other terms, Isa. xxxiii. 22. 4. What good success he had. He prevailed to break the yoke of the oppression, and, as it should seem, to break the neck of the oppressor; for it is said, *The Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim into his hand*. Now was Judah, of which tribe Othniel was, *as a lion's whelp gone up from the prey*. 5. The happy

consequence of Othniel's good services. The land, though not getting ground, yet had rest, and some fruits of the reformation, forty years; and the benefit would have been perpetual if they had kept close to God and their duty.

12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. 13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. 14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. 15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. 16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh. 17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. 18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present. 19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him. 20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. 21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: 22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. 23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. 24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of

the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. 25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth. 26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. 27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. 28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. 29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Ehud is the next of the judges whose achievements are related in this history, and here is an account of his actions.

I. When Israel sins again God raises up a new oppressor, v. 12—14. It was an aggravation of their wickedness that they did evil again after they had smarted so long for their former iniquities, promised so fair when Othniel judged them, and received so much mercy from God in their deliverance. What, and after all this, again to break his commandments! Was the disease obstinate to all the methods of cure, both corrosives and lenitives? It seems it was. Perhaps they thought they might make the more bold with their old sins because they saw themselves in no danger from their old oppressor; the powers of that kingdom were weakened and brought low. But God made them know that he had variety of rods wherewith to chastise them: He strengthened Eglon king of Moab against them. This oppressor lay nearer to them than the former, and therefore would be the more mischievous to them; God's judgments thus approached them gradually, to bring them to repentance. When Israel dwelt in tents, but kept their integrity, Balak king of Moab, who would have strengthened himself against them, was baffled; but now that they had forsaken God, and worshipped



the gods of the nations round about them (and perhaps those of the Moabites among the rest), here was another king of Moab, whom God strengthened against them, put power into his hands, though a wicked man, that he might be a scourge to Israel. The staff in his hand with which he beat Israel was God's indignation; *howbeit he meant not so, neither did his heart think so*, Isa. x. 6, 7. Israelites did ill, and, we may suppose, Moabites did worse; yet because God commonly punishes the sins of his own people in this world, that, the flesh being destroyed, the spirit may be saved, Israel are weakened and Moab strengthened against them. God would not suffer the Israelites, when they were the stronger, to distress the Moabites, nor give them any disturbance, though they were idolaters (Deut. ii. 9); yet now he suffered the Moabites to distress Israel, and strengthened them on purpose that they might: *Thy judgments, O God! are a great deep*. The king of Moab took to his assistance the Ammonites and Amalekites (v. 13), and this strengthened him; and we are here told how they prevailed. 1. They beat them in the field: *They went and smote Israel* (v. 13), not only those tribes that lay next them on the other side Jordan, who, though first settled, being frontier-tribes, were most disturbed; but those also within Jordan, for they made themselves masters of *the city of palm-trees*, which, it is probable, was a strong-hold erected near the place where Jericho had stood, for that was so called (Deut. xxxiv. 3), into which the Moabites put a garrison, to be a bridle upon Israel, and to secure the passes of Jordan, for the preservation of the communication with their own country. It was well for the Kenites that they had left this city (*ch. i. 16*) before it fell into the hands of the enemy. See how quickly the Israelites lost that by their own sin which they had gained by miracles of divine mercy. 2. They made them to serve (v. 14), that is, exacted tribute from them, either the fruits of the earth in kind or money in lieu of them. They neglected the service of God, and did not pay him his tribute; thus therefore did God recover from them that *wine and oil*, that silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal, Hos. ii. 8. What should have been paid to the divine grace, and was not, was distrained for, and paid to the divine justice. The former servitude (v. 8) lasted but eight years, this eighteen; for, if less troubles do not do the work, God will send greater.

II. When Israel prays again God raises up a new deliverer (v. 15), named *Ehud*. We are here told,

1. That he was a Benjamite. The city of palm-trees lay within the lot of this tribe, by which it is probable that they suffered most, and therefore stirred first to shake off the yoke. It is supposed by the chronologers that the Israelites' war with Benjamin for

the wickedness of Gibeah, by which that whole tribe was reduced to 600 men, happened before this, so that we may well think that tribe to be now the weakest of all the tribes, yet out of it God raised up this deliverer, in token of his being perfectly reconciled to them, to manifest his own power in ordaining strength out of weakness, and that he might bestow *more abundant honour upon that part which lacked*, 1 Cor. xii. 24.

2. That he was left-handed, as it seems many of that tribe were, *ch. xx. 16*. Benjamin signifies *the son of the right hand*, and yet multitudes of them were left-handed; for men's natures do not always answer their names. The LXX. say he was an *ambi-dexter*, one that could use both hands alike, supposing that this was an advantage to him in the action he was called to; but the Hebrew phrase, that he was *shut of his right hand*, intimates that, either through disease or disuse, he made little or no use of that, but of his left hand only, and so was the less fit for war, because he must needs handle his sword but awkwardly; yet God chose this left-handed man to be the man of his right hand, whom he would *make strong for himself*, Ps. lxxx. 17. It was *God's right hand* that gained Israel the victory (Ps. xlv. 3), not the right hand of the instruments he employed.

3. We are here told what Ehud did for the deliverance of Israel out of the hands of the Moabites. He saved the oppressed by destroying the oppressors, when the measure of their iniquity was full and the set time to favour Israel had come.

(1.) He put to death Eglon the king of Moab; I say, *put him to death*, not murdered or assassinated him, but as a judge, or minister of divine justice, executed the judgments of God upon him, as an implacable enemy to God and Israel. This story is particularly related.

[1.] He had a fair occasion of access to him. Being an ingenious active man, and fit to stand before kings, his people chose him to carry a present in the name of all Israel, over and above their tribute, to their great lord the king of Moab, that they might find favour in his eyes, v. 15. The present is called *mincha* in the original, which is the word used in the law for the offerings that were presented to God to obtain his favour; these the children of Israel had not offered in their season to the God that loved them; and now, to punish them for their neglect, they are laid under a necessity of bringing their offerings to a heathen prince that hated them. Ehud went on his errand to Eglon, offered his present with the usual ceremony and expressions of dutiful respect, the better to colour what he intended and to prevent suspicion.

[2.] It should seem, from the first, he designed to be the death of him, God putting it into his heart, and letting him know also that the motion was from himself, by the

Spirit that came upon him, the impulses of which carried with them their own evidence, and so gave him full satisfaction both as to the lawfulness and the success of this daring attempt, of both which he would have had reason enough to doubt. If he be sure that God bids him do it, he is sure both that he may do it and that he shall do it; for a command from God is sufficient to bear us out, and bring us off, both against our consciences and against all the world. That he compassed and imagined the death of this tyrant appears by the preparation he made of a weapon for the purpose, a short dagger, but half a yard long, like a bayonet, which might easily be concealed under his clothes (v. 16), perhaps because none were suffered to come near the king with their swords by their sides. This he wore on his right thigh, that it might be the more ready to his left hand, and might be the less suspected.

[3.] He contrived how to be alone with him, which he might the more easily be now that he had not only made himself known to him, but ingratiated himself by the present, and the compliments which perhaps, on this occasion, he had passed upon him. Observe how he laid his plot. *First*, He concealed his design even from his own attendants, brought them part of the way, and then ordered them to go forward towards home, while he himself, as if he had forgotten something behind him, went back to the king of Moab's court, v. 18. There needed but one hand to do the execution; had more been engaged they could not so safely have kept counsel, nor so easily have made an escape. *Secondly*, He returned from the quarries by Gilgal (v. 19), from the *graven images* (so it is in the margin) which were with Gilgal, set up perhaps by the Moabites with the twelve stones which Joshua had set up there. Some suggest that the sight of these idols stirred up in him such an indignation against the king of Moab as put him upon the execution of that design which otherwise he had thought to let fall for the present. Or, perhaps, he came so far as to these images, that, telling from what place he returned, the king of Moab might be the more apt to believe he had a message from God. *Thirdly*, He begged a private audience, and obtained it in a withdrawing-room, here called a *summer parlour*. He told the king he had a secret errand to him, who thereupon ordered all his attendants to withdraw, v. 19. Whether he expected to receive some private instructions from an oracle, or some private informations concerning the present state of Israel, as if Ehud would betray his country, it was a very unwise thing for him to be all alone with a stranger and one whom he had reason to look upon as an enemy; but those that are marked for ruin are infatuated, and their hearts hid from understanding; God deprives them of discretion.

[4.] When he had him alone he soon dis-

patched him. His summer parlour, where he used to indulge himself in ease and luxury, was the place of his execution. *First*, Ehud demands his attention to a message from God (v. 20), and that message was a dagger. God sends to us by the judgments of his hand, as well as by the judgments of his mouth. *Secondly*, Eglon pays respect to a message from God. Though a king, though a heathen king, though rich and powerful, though now tyrannizing over the people of God, though a fat unwieldy man that could not easily rise nor stand long, though in private and what he did was not under observation, yet, when he expected to receive orders from heaven, he rose out of his seat; whether it was low and easy, or whether it was high and stately, he quitted it, and stood up when God was about to speak to him, thereby owing God his superior. This shames the irreverence of many who are called Christians, and yet, when a message from God is delivered to them, study to show, by all the marks of carelessness, how little they regard it. Ehud, in calling what he had to do a message from God, plainly avouches a divine commission for it; and God's inclining Eglon to stand up to it did both confirm the commission and facilitate the execution. *Thirdly*, The message was delivered, not to his ear, but immediately, and literally, to his heart, into which the fatal knife was thrust, and was left there, v. 21, 22. His extreme fatness made him unable to resist or to help himself: probably it was the effect of his luxury and excess; and, when the fat closed up the blade, God would by this circumstance show how those that pamper the body do but prepare for their own misery. However, it was an emblem of his carnal security and senselessness. His heart was as fat as grease, and in that he thought himself enclosed. See Ps. cxix. 70; xvii. 10. Eglon signifies a calf, and he fell like a fatted calf, by the knife, an acceptable sacrifice to divine justice. Notice is taken of the coming out of the dirt or dung, that the death of this proud tyrant may appear the more ignominious and shameful. He that had been so very nice and curious about his own body, to keep it easy and clean, shall now be found wallowing in his own blood and excrements. Thus does God pour contempt upon princes. Now this act of Ehud's may justify itself because he had special direction from God to do it, and it was agreeable to the usual method which, under that dispensation, God took to avenge his people of their enemies, and to manifest to the world his own justice. But it will by no means justify any now in doing the like. No such commissions are now given, and to pretend to them is to blaspheme God, and make him patronize the worst of villanies. Christ bade Peter sheathe the sword, and we find not that he bade him draw it again.

[5.] Providence wonderfully favoured his escape, when he had done the execution.

*First*, The tyrant fell silently, without any shriek or out-cry, which might have been overheard by his servants at a distance. How silently does he go down to the pit, choked up, it may be, with his own fat, which stifled his dying groans, though he had made so great a noise in the world, and had been *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living!* *Secondly*, The heroic executioner of this vengeance, with such a presence of mind as discovered not only no consciousness of guilt, but a strong confidence in the divine protection, shut the doors after him, took the key with him, and passed through the guards with such an air of innocence, and boldness, and unconcernedness, as made them not at all to suspect his having done any thing amiss. *Thirdly*, The servants that attended in the ante-chamber, coming to the door of the inner parlour, when Ehud had gone, to know their master's pleasure, and finding it locked and all quiet, concluded he had lain down to sleep, had covered his feet upon his couch, and gone to consult his pillow about the message he had received, and to dream upon it (v. 24), and therefore would not offer to open the door. Thus by their care not to disturb his sleep they lost the opportunity of revenging his death. See what comes of men's taking state too much, and obliging those about them to keep their distance; some time or other it may come against them more than they think of. *Fourthly*, The servants at length opened the door, and found their master had *slept indeed his long sleep*, v. 25. The horror of this tragical spectacle, and the confusion it must needs put them into, to reflect upon their own inconsideration in not opening the door sooner, quite put by the thoughts of sending pursuers after him that had done it, whom now they despaired of overtaking. *Lastly*, Ehud by this means made his escape to Sierath, *a thick wood*; so some, v. 26. It is not said any where in this story what was the place in which Eglon lived now; but, there being no mention of Ehud passing and repassing Jordan, I am inclined to think that Eglon had left his own country of Moab, on the other side Jordan, and made his principal residence at this time in the city of palm-trees, within the land of Canaan, a richer country than his own, and that there he was slain, and then the quarries by Gilgal were not far off him. There where he had settled himself, and thought he had sufficiently fortified himself to lord it over the people of God, there he was cut off, and proved to be fed for the slaughter *like a lamb in a large place*.

(2.) Ehud, having slain the king of Moab, gave a total rout to the forces of the Moabites that were among them, and so effectually shook off the yoke of their oppression. [1.] He raised an army immediately in Mount Ephraim, at some distance from the headquarters of the Moabites, and headed them

himself, v. 27. The trumpet he blew was indeed a jubilee-trumpet, proclaiming liberty, and a joyful sound it was to the oppressed Israelites, who for a long time had heard no other trumpets than those of their enemies. [2.] Like a pious man, and as one that did all this in faith, he took encouragement himself, and gave encouragement to his soldiers, from the power of God engaged for them (v. 28): "*Follow me, for the Lord hath delivered your enemies into your hands; we are sure to have God with us, and therefore may go on boldly, and shall go on triumphantly.*" [3.] Like a politic general, he first secured the fords of Jordan, set strong guards upon all those passes, to cut off the communications between the Moabites that were in the land of Israel (for upon them only his design was) and their own country on the other side Jordan, that if, upon the alarm given them, they resolved to fly, they might not escape thither, and, if they resolved to fight, they might not have assistance thence. Thus he shut them up in that land as their prison in which they were pleasing themselves as their palace and paradise. [4.] He then fell upon them, and put them all to the sword, 10,000 of them, which it seems was the number appointed to keep Israel in subjection (v. 29): "*There escaped not a man of them.* And they were the best and choicest of all the king of Moab's forces, all lusty men, men of bulk and stature, and not only able-bodied, but high spirited too, and men of valour, v. 29. But neither their strength nor their courage stood them in any stead when the set time had come for God to deliver them into the hand of Israel. [5.] The consequence of this victory was that the power of the Moabites was wholly broken in the land of Israel. The country was cleared of these oppressors, and *the land had rest eighty years*, v. 30. We may hope that there was likewise a reformation among them, and a check given to idolatry, by the influence of Ehud which continued a good part of this time. It was a great while for the land to rest, fourscore years; yet what is that to the saints' everlasting rest in the heavenly Canaan?

31 And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

When it is said *the land had rest eighty years*, some think it is meant chiefly of that part of the land which lay eastward on the banks of Jordan, which had been oppressed by the Moabites; but it seems, by this passage here, that the other side of the country which lay south-west was in that time infested by the Philistines, against whom Shamgar made head. 1. It seems Israel needed deliverance, *for he delivered Israel*; how great the distress was Deborah afterwards related in her song (ch. v. 6.), that *in the days of Shamgar the highways were un-*

occupied, &c.; that part of the country which lay next to the Philistines was so infested with plunderers that people could not travel the roads in safety, but were in danger of being set upon and robbed, nor durst they dwell in the unguarded villages, but were forced to take shelter in the fortified cities. 2. God raised him up to deliver them, as it should seem, while Ehud was yet living, but superannuated. So inconsiderable were the enemies for number that it seems the killing of 600 of them amounted to a deliverance of Israel, and so many he slew with an ox-goad, or, as some read it, a plough-shore. It is probable that he was himself following the plough when the Philistines made an inroad upon the country to ravage it, and God put it into his heart to oppose them; the impulse being sudden and strong, and having neither sword nor spear to do execution with, he took the instrument that was next at hand, some of the tools of his plough, and with that killed so many hundred men and came off unhurt. See here, (1.) That God can make those eminently serviceable to his glory and his church's good whose extraction, education, and employment, are very mean and obscure. He that has the residue of the Spirit could, when he pleased, make ploughmen judges and generals, and fishermen apostles. (2.) It is no matter how weak the weapon is if God direct and strengthen the arm. An ox-goad, when God pleases, shall do more than Goliath's sword. And sometimes he chooses to work by such unlikely means, that the excellency of the power may appear to be of God.

## CHAP. IV.

The method of the history of Deborah and Barak (the heroes in this chapter) is the same with that before. Here is, I. Israel revolted from God, ver. 1. II. Israel oppressed by Jabin, ver. 2, 3. III. Israel judged by Deborah, ver. 4, 5. IV. Israel rescued out of the hands of Jabin. 1. Their deliverance is concerted between Deborah and Barak, ver. 6, 9. 2. It is accomplished by their joint-agency. Barak takes the field, ver. 10. Sisera, Jabin's general, meets him, ver. 12, 13. Deborah encourages him, ver. 14. And God gives him a complete victory. The army routed, ver. 13, 16. The general forced to flee, ver. 17. And where he expected shelter he had his life stolen from him by Jael while he was asleep (ver. 18-21), which completes Barak's triumph (ver. 22) and Israel's deliverance, ver. 23, 24.

AND the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. 2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. 3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

Here is, I. Israel backsliding from God: They again *did evil in his sight*, forsook his service, and worshipped idols; for this was the sin which now most easily beset them,

v. 1. See in this, 1. The strange strength of corruption, which hurries men into sin notwithstanding the most frequent experience of its fatal consequences. The bent to backslide is with great difficulty restrained. 2. The common ill effects of a long peace. The land had rest eighty years, which should have confirmed them in their religion; but, on the contrary, it made them secure and wanton, and indulgent of those lusts which the worship of the false gods was calculated for the gratification of. Thus *the prosperity of fools destroys them. Jeshurun waxeth fat and kicketh.* 3. The great loss which a people sustains by the death of good governors. *They did evil, because Ehud was dead.* So it may be read. He kept a strict eye upon them, restrained and punished every thing that looked towards idolatry, and kept them close to God's service. But, when he was gone, they revolted, fearing him more than God.

II. Israel oppressed by their enemies. When they forsook God, he forsook them; and then they became an easy prey to every spoiler. They alienated themselves from God as if he were none of theirs; and then God alienated them as none of his. Those that threw themselves out of God's service threw themselves out of his protection. *What has my beloved to do in my house when she has thus played the harlot?* Jer. xi. 15. He sold them into the hand of Jabin, v. 2. This Jabin reigned in Hazor, as another of the same name, and perhaps his ancestor, had done before him, whom Joshua routed and slew, and burnt his city, Josh. xi. 1, 10. But it seems, in process of time, the city was rebuilt, the power regained, the loss retrieved, and, by degrees, the king of Hazor becomes able to tyrannize over Israel, who by sin had lost all their advantage against the Canaanites. This servitude was longer than either of the former, and much more grievous. Jabin, and his general Sisera, did mightily oppress Israel. That which aggravated the oppression was, 1. That this enemy was nearer to them than any of the former, in their borders, in their bowels, and by this means had the more opportunity to do them a mischief. 2. That they were the natives of the country, who bore an implacable enmity to them, for invading and dispossessing them, and when they had them in their power would be so much the more cruel and mischievous towards them in revenge of the old quarrel. 3. That these Canaanites had formerly been conquered and subdued by Israel, were of old sentenced to be their servants (Gen. ix. 25), and might now have been under their feet, and utterly incapable of giving them any disturbance, if their own slothfulness, cowardice, and unbelief, had not suffered them thus to get head. To be oppressed by those whom their fathers had conquered, and whom they themselves had foolishly spared, could not but be very grievous.

III. Israel returning to their God: They *cried unto the Lord*, when distress drove them to him, and they saw no other way of relief. Those that slight God in their prosperity will find themselves under a necessity of seeking him when they are in trouble.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. 5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, *saying*, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? 7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. 8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, *then* I will not go. 9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

The year of the redeemed at length came, when Israel was to be delivered out of the hands of Jabin, and restored again to their liberty, which we may suppose the northern tribes, that lay nearest to the oppressors and felt most the effects of his fury, did in a particular manner cry to God for. *For the oppression of the poor, and the sighing of the needy, now will God arise* Now here we have,

I. The preparation of the people for their deliverance, by the prophetic conduct and government of Deborah, *v. 4, 5*. Her name signifies a *bee*; and she answered her name by her industry, sagacity, and great usefulness to the public, her sweetness to her friends and sharpness to her enemies. She is said to be *the wife of Lapidoth*; but, the termination not being commonly found in the name of a man, some make this the name of a place: she was a *woman of Lapidoth*. Others take it appellatively, Lapidoth signifies *lamps*. The Rabbin say she had employed herself in making wicks for the lamps of the tabernacle; and, having stooped to

that mean office for God, she was afterwards thus preferred. Or she was a woman of *illuminations*, or of *splendours*, one that was extraordinarily knowing and wise, and so came to be very eminent and illustrious. Concerning her we are here told, 1. That she was intimately acquainted with God; she was a *prophetess*, one that was instructed in divine knowledge by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God, and had gifts of wisdom, to which she attained not in an ordinary way: she *heard the words of God*, and probably *saw the visions of the Almighty*. 2. That she was entirely devoted to the service of Israel. She judged Israel at the time that Jabin oppressed them; and perhaps, being a woman, she was the more easily permitted by the oppressor to do it. She judged, not as a princess, by any civil authority conferred upon her, but as a prophetess, and as God's mouth to them, correcting abuses and redressing grievances, especially those which related to the worship of God. The children of Israel came up to her from all parts for judgment, not so much for the deciding of controversies between man and man as for advice in the reformation of what was amiss in things pertaining to God. Those among them who before had secretly lamented the impieties and idolatries of their neighbours, but knew not where to apply for the restraining of them, now made their complaints to Deborah, who, by the sword of the Spirit, showing them the judgment of God, reduced and reclaimed many, and excited and animated the magistrates in their respective districts to put the laws in execution. It is said she *dwelt*, or, as some read it, she *sat* under a palm-tree, called ever after from her *the palm-tree of Deborah*. Either she had her house under that tree, a mean habitation which would couch under a tree, or she had her judgment-seat in the open air, under the shadow of that tree, which was an emblem of the justice she sat there to administer, which will thrive and grow against opposition, as palms under pressures. Josephus says that the children of Israel came to Deborah, to desire her to pray to God for them, that they might be delivered out of the hand of Jabin; and Samuel is said at one particular time to judge Israel in Mizpeh, that is, to bring them back again to God, when they made the same address to him upon a like occasion, 1 Sam. vii. 6, 8.

II. The project laid for their deliverance. When the children of Israel *came to her for judgment*, with her they found salvation. So those that seek to God for grace shall have grace and peace, grace and comfort, grace and glory. She was not herself fit to command an army in person, being a woman; but she nominated one that was fit, Barak of Naphtali, who, it is probable, had already signalized himself in some rencounters with the forces of the oppressor, living near him for Hazor and Harosheth lay within the lot

of that tribe), and thereby had gained a reputation and interest among his people. Some struggles, we may suppose, that brave man had made towards the shaking off of the yoke, but could not effect it till he had his commission and instructions from Deborah. He could do nothing without her head, nor she without his hands; but both together made a complete deliverer, and effected a complete deliverance. The greatest and best are not self-sufficient, but need one another.

1. By God's direction, she orders Barak to raise an army, and engage Jabin's forces, that were under Sisera's command, *v. 6, 7*. Barak, it may be, had been meditating some great attempt against the common enemy; a spark of generous fire was glowing in his breast, and he would fain do something to the purpose for his people and for the cities of his God. But two things discouraged him:

(1.) He wanted a commission to levy forces; this therefore Deborah here gives him under the broad seal of heaven, which, as a prophetess, she had a warrant to affix to it: "*Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded it?*" Yes, certainly he has; take my word for it." Some think she intends this as an appeal to Barak's own heart. "Has not God, by a secret whisper to thyself, given thee some intimation of his purpose to make use of thee as an instrument in his hands to save Israel? Hast not thou felt some impulse of this kind upon thy own spirit?" If so, the spirit of prophesy in Deborah confirms the spirit of a soldier in Barak: *Go and draw towards Mount Tabor*. [1.] She directs him what number of men to raise—10,000; and let him not fear that these will be too few, when God hath said he will by them save Israel. [2.] Whence he should raise them—only out of his own tribe, and that of Zebulun next adjoining. These two counties should furnish him with an army sufficient; he need not stay to go further. And, [3.] She orders him where to make his rendezvous—at Mount Tabor, in his own neighbourhood.

(2.) When he had an army raised, he knew not how he should have an opportunity of engaging the enemy, who perhaps declined fighting, having heard that Israel, if they had but courage enough to make head against an enemy, seldom failed of success. "Well," says Deborah, in the name of "God, *I will draw unto thee Sisera and his army*." She assured him that the matter should be determined by one pitched battle, and should not be long in the doing. [1.] In mentioning the power of the enemy, Sisera, a celebrated general, bold and experienced, his chariots, his iron chariots, and his multitude of soldiers, she obliged Barak to fortify himself with the utmost degree of resolution; for the enemy he was to engage was a very formidable one. It is good to know the worst, that we may provide accordingly. But, [2.] In fixing the very place to which

Sisera would draw his army, she gave him a sign, which might help to confirm his faith when he came to engage. It was a contingent thing, and depended upon Sisera's own will; but, when afterwards Barak should see the event falling out just as Deborah had foretold, he might thence infer that certainly in the rest she said she spoke under a divine direction, which would be a great encouragement to him, especially because with this, [3.] She gave him an express promise of success: *I will* (that is, God will, in whose name I speak) *deliver them into thy hand*; so that when he saw them drawn up against him, according to Deborah's word, he might be confident that, according to her word, he should soon see them fallen before him. Observe, God *drew them to him* only that he might *deliver them into his hand*. When Sisera drew his forces together, he designed the destruction of Israel; but God *gathered them as sheaves into the floor*, for their own destruction, Mic. iv. 11, 12. *Assemble yourselves, and you shall be broken to pieces*, Isa. viii. 9. See Rev. xix. 17, 18.

2. At Barak's request, she promises to go along with him to the field of battle. (1.) Barak insisted much upon the necessity of her presence, which would be to him better than a council of war (*v. 8*): "*If thou wilt go with me to direct and advise me, and in every difficult case to let me know God's mind, then I will go with all my heart, and not fear the chariots of iron; otherwise not*." Some make this to be the language of a weak faith: he could not take her word unless he had her with him in pawn, as it were, for performance. It seems rather to arise from a conviction of the necessity of God's presence and continual direction, a pledge and earnest of which he would reckon Deborah's presence to be, and therefore begged thus earnestly for it. "*If thou go not up with me, in token of God's going with me, carry me not up hence*." Nothing would be a greater satisfaction to him than to have the prophetess with him to animate the soldiers and to be consulted as an oracle upon all occasions. (2.) Deborah promised to go with him, *v. 9*. No toil nor peril shall discourage her from doing the utmost that becomes her to do for the service of her country. She would not send him where she would not go herself. Those that in God's name call others to their duty should be very ready to assist them in it. Deborah was the weaker vessel, yet had the stronger faith. But though she agrees to go with Barak, if he insists upon it, she gives him a hint proper enough to move a soldier not to insist upon it: *The journey thou undertakest* (so confident was she of the success that she called his engaging in war but the undertaking of a journey) *shall not be for thy honour; not so much for thy honour as if thou hadst gone by thyself; for the Lord shall sell Sisera* (now his turn comes to be sold as Israel was,

v. 2., by way of reprisal) *into the hands of a woman*;" that is, [1.] The world would ascribe the victory to the hand of Deborah: this he might himself foresee. [2.] God (to correct his weakness) would complete the victory by the hand of Jael, which would be some eclipse to his glory. But Barak values the satisfaction of his mind, and the good success of his enterprise, more than his honour; and therefore will by no means drop his request. He dares not fight unless he have Deborah with him, to direct him and pray for him. She therefore stood to her word with a masculine courage; this noble heroine *arose and went with Barak*.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him. 11 Now Heber the Kenite, *which was* of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which *is* by Kedesh. 12 And they showed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. 13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, *even* nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that *were* with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon. 14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this *is* the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. 15 And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away on his feet. 16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left.

Here, I. Barak beats up for volunteers, and soon has his quota of men ready, v. 10. Deborah had appointed him to raise an army of 10,000 men (v. 6), and so many he has presently *at his feet*, following him, and subject to his command. God is said to call us *to his feet* (Isa. xli. 2), that is, into obedience to him. Some think it intimates that they were all footmen, and so the armies of the Jews generally were, which made the dis-

proportion of strength between them and the enemy (who had horses and chariots) very great, and the victory the more illustrious; but the presence of God and his prophetic was abundantly sufficient to balance that disproportion. Barak had his men *at his feet*, which intimates their cheerfulness and readiness to attend him whithersoever he went, Rev. xiv. 4. Though the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were chiefly depended on, yet it appears by Deborah's song that some had come in to him from other tribes (Manasseh and Issachar), and more were expected that came not, from Reuben, Dan, and Asher, *ch.* v. 14—17. But these are overlooked here; and we are only told that to make his 10,000 men effective indeed *Deborah went up with him*. The 11th verse, concerning the removal of Heber, one of the families of the Kenites, out of the wilderness of Judah, in the south, where those families had fixed themselves (*ch.* i. 16), into the northern country, comes in for the sake of what was to follow concerning the exploit of Jael, a wife of that family.

II. Sisera, upon notice of Barak's motions, takes the field with a very numerous and powerful army (v. 12, 13): *They showed Sisera*, that is, it was shown to him. Yet some think it refers to the Kenites, mentioned immediately before, v. 11. They gave Sisera notice of Barak's rendezvous, there being peace at this time between Jabin and that family, v. 17. Whether they intended it as a kindness to him or no, it served to accomplish what God had said by Deborah (v. 7): *I will draw unto thee Sisera*. Sisera's confidence was chiefly in his chariots; therefore particular notice is taken of them, 900 *chariots of iron*, which, with the scythes fastened to their axle-trees, when they were driven into an army of footmen, did terrible execution. So ingenious have men been in inventing methods of destroying one another, to gratify those lusts *from which come wars and fightings*.

III. Deborah gives orders to engage the enemy, v. 14. Josephus says that when Barak saw Sisera's army drawn up, and attempting to surround the mountain on the top of which he and his forces lay encamped, his heart quite failed him, and he determined to retire to a place of greater safety; but Deborah animated him to make a descent upon Sisera, assuring him that this was the day marked out in the divine counsels for his defeat. "Now they appear most threatening they are ripe for ruin. The thing is as sure to be done as if it were done already: *The Lord hath delivered Sisera into thy hand*." See how the work and honour of this great action are divided between Deborah and Barak; she, as the head, *gives the word*, he, as the hand, *does the work*. Thus does God dispense his gifts variously, 1 Cor. xii. 4, &c. But, though ordinarily *the head of the woman is the man* (1 Cor. xi. 3), he that has the

residue of the Spirit was pleased to cross hands, and to put the head upon the woman's shoulders, choosing the weak things of the world to shame the mighty, that no flesh might glory in his presence. It was well for Barak that he had Deborah with him; for she made up what was defective, 1. In his conduct, by telling him, *This is the day.* 2. In his courage, by assuring him of God's presence: "*Has not the Lord gone out before thee? Darest not thou follow when thou hast God himself for thy leader?*" Note, (1.) In every undertaking it is good to be satisfied that God goes before us, that we are in the way of our duty and under his direction. (2.) If we have ground to hope that God goes before us, we ought to go on with courage and cheerfulness. Be not dismayed at the difficulties thou meetest with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him; for *has not the Lord gone out before thee?* Follow him fully then.

IV. God himself routs the enemy's army, v. 15. Barak, in obedience to Deborah's orders, went down into the valley, though there upon the plain the iron chariots would have so much the more advantage against him, quitting his fastnesses upon the mountain in dependence upon the divine power; for *in vain is salvation hoped for from hills and mountains; in the Lord alone is the salvation of his people,* Jer. iii. 23. And he was not deceived in his confidence: *The Lord discomfited Sisera.* It was not so much the bold and surprising alarm which Barak gave their camp that dispirited and dispersed them, but God's terror seized their spirits and put them into an unaccountable confusion. *The stars, it seems, fought against them,* ch. v. 20. Josephus says that a violent storm of hail which beat in their faces gave them this rout, disabled them, and drove them back; so that they became a very easy prey to the army of Israel, and Deborah's words were made good: "*The Lord has delivered them into thy hand; it is now in thy power to do what thou wilt with them.*"

V. Barak bravely improves his advantage, follows the blow with undaunted resolution and unwearied diligence, prosecutes the victory, pursues the scattered forces, even to their general's head-quarters at Harosheth (v. 16), and spares none whom God had delivered into his hand to be destroyed: *There was not a man left.* When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts we must bestir ourselves; and, when by grace he gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness and resolution, and carry on the holy war with vigour.

17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for *there was peace between Jabin the king of*

Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. 19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. 20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. 21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. 22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples. 23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. 24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

We have seen the army of the Canaanites totally routed. It is said (Ps. lxxxiii. 9, 10, where the defeat of this army is pleaded as a precedent for God's doing the like in after times) that they became *as dung for the earth.* Now here we have,

I. The fall of their general, Sisera, captain of the host, in whom, it is likely, Jabin their king put an entire confidence, and therefore was not himself present in the action. Let us trace the steps of this mighty man's fall.

1. He quitted his chariot, and took to his feet, v. 15, 17. His chariots had been his pride and his confidence; and we may suppose he had therefore despised and defied the armies of the living God, because they were all on foot, and had neither chariot nor horse, as he had. Justly therefore is he thus made ashamed of his confidence, and forced to quit it, and thinks himself then most safe and easy when he has got clear of his chariot, though we may well suppose it the best made, and best drawn, of any of them. Thus are those disappointed who



rest on the creature; like a broken reed, it not only breaks under them, but runs into their hand, and pierceth them with many sorrows. The idol may quickly become a burden (Isa. xlvi. 1), and what we were sick for God can make us sick of. How miserable doth Sisera look now he is dismounted! It is hard to say whether he blusheth or trembleth more. Put not your trust in princes, if they may so soon be brought to this, if he who but lately trusted to his arms with so much assurance must now trust to his heels only with so little.

2. He fled for shelter to the tents of the Kenites, having no strong-hold, nor any place of his own in reach to retire to. The mean and solitary way of the Kenites' living, perhaps, he had formerly despised and ridiculed, and the more because religion was kept up among them; yet now he is glad to put himself under the protection of one of these tents: and he chooses the wife's tent or apartment, either because less suspected, or because it happened to be next to him, and the first he came to, v. 17. And that which encouraged him to go thither was that at this time there was peace between his master and the house of Heber: not that there was any league offensive and defensive between them, only at present there were no indications of hostility. Jabin did them no harm, did not oppress them as he did the Israelites, their plain, quiet, harmless way of living-making them not suspected nor feared, and perhaps God so ordering it as a recompence for their constant adherence to the true religion. Sisera thought he might therefore be safe among them; not considering that, though they themselves suffered not by Jabin's power, they heartily sympathized with the Israel of God that did.

3. Jael invited him in, and bade him very welcome. Probably she stood at the tent door, to enquire what news from the army, and what was the success of the battle which was fought not far off. (1.) She invited him in. Perhaps she stood waiting for an opportunity to show kindness to any distressed Israelite, if there should be occasion for it; but seeing Sisera come in great haste, panting and out of breath, she invited him to come and repose himself in her tent, in which, while she seemed to design the relieving of his fatigue, perhaps she really intended the retarding of his flight, that he might fall into the hands of Barak, who was now in a hot chase after him (v. 18), and it may well be questioned whether she had at first any thought of taking away his life, but rather God afterwards put it into her heart. (2.) She made very much of him, and seemed mighty careful to have him easy, as her invited guest. Was he weary? she finds him a very convenient place to repose himself in, and recruit his strength. Was he thirsty? well he might. Did he want a little water to cool his tongue? the best liquor her tent

afforded was at his service, and that was milk (v. 19), which, we may suppose, he drank heartily of, and, being refreshed with it, was the better disposed to sleep. Was he cold, or afraid of catching cold? or did he desire to be hid from the pursuers, if they should search that tent? she covered him with a mantle, v. 18. All expressions of care for his safety. Only when he desired her to tell a lie for him, and to say he was not there, she declined making any such promise, v. 20. We must not sin against God, no, not to oblige those we would show ourselves most observant of. *Lastly*, We must suppose she kept her tent as quiet as she could, and free from noise, that he might sleep the sooner and the faster. And now was Sisera least safe when he was most secure. How uncertain and precarious is human life! and what assurance can we have of it, when it may so easily be betrayed by those with whom it is trusted, and those may prove its destroyers who we hoped would be its protectors! It is best making God our friend, for he will not deceive us.

4. When he lay fast asleep she drove a long nail through his temples, so fastened his head to the ground, and killed him, v. 21. And, though this was enough to do the business, yet, to make sure work (if we translate it right, *ch.* v. 26), she cut off his head, and left it nailed there. Whether she designed this or no when she invited him into her tent does not appear; probably the thought was darted into her mind when she saw him lie so conveniently to receive such a fatal blow; and, doubtless, the thought brought with it evidence sufficient that it came not from Satan as a murderer and destroyer, but from God as a righteous judge and avenger, so much of brightness and heavenly light did she perceive in the inducements to it that offered themselves, the honour of God and the deliverance of Israel, and nothing of the blackness of malice, hatred, or personal revenge. (1.) It was a divine power that enabled her to do it, and inspired her with a more than manly courage. What if her hand should shake, and she should miss her blow? What if he should awake when she was attempting it? Or suppose some of his own attendants should follow him, and surprise her in the fact, how dearly would she and all hers be made to pay for it? Yet, obtaining help of God, she did it effectually. (2.) It was a divine warrant that justified her in the doing of it; and therefore, since no such extraordinary commissions can now be pretended, it ought not in any case to be imitated. The laws of friendship and hospitality must be religiously observed, and we must abhor the thought of betraying any whom we have invited and encouraged to put a confidence in us. And, as to this act of Jael (like that of Ehud in the chapter before), we have reason to think she was cou-

scious of such a divine impulse upon her spirit to do it as did abundantly satisfy herself (and it ought therefore to satisfy us) that it was well done. God's judgments are a great deep. The instrument of this execution was a nail of the tent, that is, one of the great pins with which the tent, or the stakes of it, were fastened. They often removing their tents, she had been used to drive these nails, and therefore knew how to do it the more dexterously on this great occasion. He that thought to destroy Israel with his many iron chariots is himself destroyed with one iron nail. Thus do the weak things of the world confound the mighty. See here Jael's glory and Sisera's shame. The great commander dies, [1.] In his sleep, fast asleep, and weary. It comes in as a reason why he stirred not, to make resistance. So fettered was he in the chains of sleep that he could not find his hands. Thus *the stout-hearted are spoiled at thy rebuke, O God of Jacob! they are cast into a dead sleep, and so are made to sleep their last*, Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength; for when he sleeps where is it? It is weak, and he can do nothing; a child may insult him then, and steal his life from him; and yet if he sleep not he is soon spent and weary, and can do nothing either. Those words which we here put in a parenthesis (*for he was weary*) all the ancient versions read otherwise: *he struggled* (or started, as we say) *and died*, so the Syriac and Arabic, *Eragitans sese mortuus est. He fainted and died*, so the Chaldee. *He was darkened and died*, so the LXX. *Consocians morte soporem*, so the vulgar Latin, joining sleep and death together, seeing they are so near akin. *He fainted and died*. He dies, [2.] With his head nailed to the ground, an emblem of his earthly-mindedness. *O curve in terram anime!* His ear (says bishop Hall) was fastened close to the earth, as if his body had been listening what had become of his soul. He dies, [3.] By the hand of a woman. This added to the shame of his death before men; and had he but known it, as Abimelech (*ch. ix. 54*), we may well imagine how much it would have added to the vexation of his own heart.

II. The glory and joy of Israel hereupon. 1. Barak their leader finds his enemy dead, (*v. 22*), and no doubt, he was very well pleased to find his work done so well to his hand, and so much to the glory of God and the confusion of his enemies. Had he stood too nicely upon a point of honour, he would have resented it as an affront to have the general slain by any hand but his; but now he remembered that this diminution of his honour he was sentenced to undergo, for *insisting upon Deborah's going with him (the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman)*, though then it was little thought that the prediction would be fulfilled in such a way as this. 2. Israel is

completely delivered out of the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, *v. 23, 24*. They not only shook off his yoke by this day's victory, but they afterwards prosecuted the war against him, till they had destroyed him, he and his nation being by the divine appointment devoted to ruin and not to be spared. The Israelites, having soundly smarted for their foolish pity in not doing it before, resolve now it is in their power to indulge them no longer, but to make a thorough riddance of them, as a people to whom to show mercy was as contrary to their own interest as it was to God's command; and probably it is with an eye to the sentence they were under that this enemy is named three times here in these last two verses, and called *king of Canaan*; for as such he was to be destroyed; and so thoroughly was he destroyed that I do not remember to read of the kings of Canaan any more after this. The children of Israel would have prevented a great deal of mischief if they had sooner destroyed these Canaanites, as God had both commanded and enabled them; but better be wise late, and buy wisdom by experience, than never wise.

## CHAP. V.

This chapter contains the triumphal song which was composed and sung upon occasion of that glorious victory which Israel obtained over the forces of Jabin king of Canaan and the happy consequences of that victory. Probably it was usual then to publish poems upon such occasions, as now; but this only is preserved of all the poems of that age of the judges, because dictated by Deborah a prophetess, designed for a psalm of praise then, and a pattern of praise to after-ages, and it gives a great deal of light to the history of these times. I. It begins with praise to God, *ver. 2, 3*. II. The substance of this song transmits the memory of this great achievement. 1. Comparing God's appearances for them on this occasion with his appearances to them on Mount Sinai, *ver. 4, 5*. 2. Magnifying their deliverance from the consideration of the calamitous condition they had been in, *ver. 6-8*. 3. Calling those to join in praise that shared in the benefits of the success, *ver. 9-13*. 4. Reflecting honour upon those tribes that were forward and active in that war, and disgrace on those that declined the service, *ver. 14-19, 23*. 5. Taking notice how God himself fought for them, *ver. 20-22*. 6. Celebrating particularly the honour of Jael, that slew Sisera, on which head the song is very large, *ver. 24-30*. It concludes with a prayer to God, *ver. 31*.

**T**HEN sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, 2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. 3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. 4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. 5 The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

The former chapter let us know what great things God had done for Israel; in this we have the thankful returns they made to God, that all ages of the church might learn that work of heaven to praise God.

1. God is praised by a song, which is, 1.

A very natural expression of rejoicing. *Is any merry?* Let him sing; and holy joy is the very soul and root of praise and thanksgiving. God is pleased to reckon himself glorified by our joy in him, and in his prodigious works. His servants' joy is his delight, and their songs are melody to him.

2. A very proper expedient for spreading the knowledge and perpetuating the remembrance of great events. Neighbours would learn this song one of another and children of their parents; and by that means those who had not books, or could not read, yet would be made acquainted with these works of God; and one generation would thus praise God's works to another, and declare his mighty acts, Ps. cxlv. 4, &c.

11. Deborah herself penned this song, as appears by v. 7: *Till I Deborah arose.* And the first words should be rendered, *Then she sang, even Deborah.* 1. She used her gifts as a prophetess in composing the song, and the strain throughout is very fine and lofty, the images are lively, the expressions elegant, and an admirable mixture there is in it of sweetness and majesty. No poetry is comparable to the sacred poetry. And, 2. We may suppose she used her power as a princess, in obliging the conquering army of Israel to learn and sing this song. She expects not that they should, by their poems, celebrate her praises and magnify her, but requires that in this poem they should join with her in celebrating God's praises and magnifying him. She had been the first wheel in the action, and now is so in the thanksgiving.

III. It was sung on that day, not the very day that the fight was, but on that occasion, and soon after, as soon as a thanksgiving day could conveniently be appointed. When we have received mercy from God, we ought to be speedy in our returns of praise, while the impressions of the mercy are fresh. It is rent to be paid at the day.

1. She begins with a general Hallelujah: *Praise (or bless, for that is the word) you the Lord, v. 2.* The design of the song is to give glory to God; this therefore is put first, to explain and direct all that follows, like the first petition of the Lord's prayer, *Hallowed be thy name.* Two things God is here praised for:—(1.) The vengeance he took on Israel's enemies, for the avenging of Israel upon their proud and cruel oppressors, recompensing into their bosoms all the injuries they had done to his people. *The Lord is known* as a righteous God, and the God to whom vengeance belongs *by the judgments which he executeth.* (2.) The grace he gave to Israel's friends, *when the people willingly offered themselves* to serve in this war. God is to have the glory of all the good offices that are at any time done us; and the more willingly they are done the more is to be observed of that grace which gives both to will and to do. For these two things she re-

solves to leave this song upon record, to the honour of the everlasting God (v. 3): *I, even I, will sing unto the Lord, Jehovah, that God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power, even to the Lord God of Israel, who governs all for the good of the church.*

2. She calls to the great ones of the world, that sit at the upper end of its table, to attend to her song, and take notice of the subject of it: *Hear, O you kings! give ear, O you princes!* (1.) She would have them know that as great and as high as they were there was one above them with whom it is folly to contend, and to whom it was their interest to submit, that horses and chariots are vain things for safety. (2.) She would have them to join with her in praising the God of Israel, and no longer to praise their counterfeit deities, as Belshazzar did. Dan. v. 4, *He praised the gods of gold and silver.* She bespeaks them as the psalmist (Ps. ii. 10, 11), *Be wise now therefore, O you kings! serve the Lord with fear.* (3.) She would have them take warning by Sisera's fate, and not dare to offer any injury to the people of God, whose cause, sooner or later, God will plead with jealousy.

3. She looks back upon God's former appearances, and compares this with them, the more to magnify the glorious author of this great salvation. What God is doing should bring to our mind what he has done; for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever (v. 4): *Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir.* This may be understood either, (1.) Of the appearances of God's power and justice against the enemies of Israel to subdue and conquer them; and so Hab. iii. 3, 4, &c., is parallel to it, where the destruction of the church's enemies is thus described. When God had led his people Israel from the country of Edom he brought down under their feet Sihon and Og, striking them and their armies with such terror and amazement that they seemed apprehensive heaven and earth were coming together. Their hearts melted, as if all the world had been melting round about them. Or it notes the glorious displays of the divine majesty, and the surprising effects of the divine power, enough to make the earth tremble, the heavens drop like snow before the sun, and the mountains to melt. Compare Ps. xviii. 7. God's counsels are so far from being hindered by any creature that, when the time of their accomplishment comes, that which seemed to stand in their way will not only yield before them, but be made to serve them. See Isa. lxiv. 1, 2. Or, (2.) It is meant of the appearances of God's glory and majesty to Israel, when he gave them his law at Mount Sinai. It was then literally true, *the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, &c.* Compare Deut. xxxiii. 2; Ps. lxxviii. 7, 8. Let all the kings and princes know that this is the God whom Deborah praises, and not such mean and impotent deities as they paid

their homage to. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the giving of the law, but has a strange descant on those words, *the mountains melted. Tabor, Hermon, and Carmel, contended among themselves: one said, Let the divine majesty dwell upon me; the other said, Let it dwell upon me; but God made it to dwell upon Mount Sinai, the meanest and least of all the mountains.* I suppose it means the least valuable, because barren and rocky.

6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. 7 *The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.* 8 They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? 9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. 10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. 11 *They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.*

Here, I. Deborah describes the distressed state of Israel under the tyranny of Jabin, that the greatness of their trouble might make their salvation appear the more illustrious and the more gracious (v. 6): *From the days of Shamgar, who did something towards the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, to the days of Jael, the present day, in which Jael has so signalized herself, the country has been in a manner desolate.* 1. No trade. For want of soldiers to protect men of business in their business from the incursions of the enemy, and for want of magistrates to restrain and punish thieves and robbers among them (men of broken fortunes and desperate spirits, that, having no employment, took to rob on the high-road), all commerce ceased, and the highways were unoccupied; no caravans of merchants, as formerly. 2. No travelling. Whereas in times when there was some order and government the travellers might be safe in the open roads, and the robbers were forced to lurk in the by-ways, now, on the contrary, the robbers insulted on the open roads without check, and the honest travellers were obliged to sculk and walk

through by-ways, in continual frights. 3. No tillage. The fields must needs be laid waste and unoccupied when the inhabitants of the villages, the country farmers, ceased from their employment, quitted their houses which were continually alarmed and plundered by the banditti, and were obliged to take shelter for themselves and their families in walled and fenced cities. 4. No administration of justice. There was war in the gates where their courts were kept, v. 8. So that it was not till this salvation was wrought that *the people of the Lord durst go down to the gates, v. 11.* The continual incursions of the enemy deprived the magistrates of the dignity, and the people of the benefit, of their government. 5. No peace to him that went out nor to him that came in. The gates through which they passed and repassed were infested by the enemy; nay, the places of drawing water were alarmed by the archers—a mighty achievement to terrify the drawers of water. 6. Neither arms nor spirit to help themselves with, not a *shield nor spear seen among forty thousand, v. 8.* Either they were disarmed by their oppressors, or they themselves neglected the art of war; so that, though they had spears and shields, they were not to be seen, but were thrown by and suffered to rust, they having neither skill nor will to use them.

II. She shows in one word what it was that brought all this misery upon them: *They chose new gods, v. 8.* It was their idolatry that provoked God to give them up thus into the hands of their enemies. The Lord their God was one Lord, but this would not content them: they must have more, many more, still more. Their God was the Ancient of days, still the same, and therefore they grew weary of him, and must have new gods, which they were as fond of as children of new clothes, names newly invented, heroes newly canonized. Their fathers, when put to their choice, chose the Lord for their God (Josh. xxiv. 21), but they would not abide by that choice, they must have gods of their own choosing.

III. She takes notice of God's great goodness to Israel in raising up such as should redress these grievances. Herself first (v. 7): *Till that I Deborah arose, to restrain and punish those who disturbed the public peace, and protect men in their business, and then the face of things was changed for the better quickly; those beasts of prey retired upon the breaking forth of this joyful light, and man went forth again to his work and labour, Ps. civ. 22, 23.* Thus she became a mother in Israel, a nursing mother, such was the affection she bore to her people, and such the care and pains she took for the public welfare. Under her there were other governors of Israel (v. 9), who, like her, had done their part as governors to reform the people, and then, like her, offered themselves willingly to serve in the war, not insisting upon

the exemption which their dignity and office entitled them to, when they had so fair an opportunity of appearing in their country's cause; and no doubt the example of the governors influenced the people in like manner *willingly to offer themselves, v. 2.* Of these governors she says, *My heart is towards them, that is, "I truly love and honour them; they have won my heart for ever; I shall never forget them."* Note, Those are worthy of double honour that recede voluntarily from the demands of their honour to serve God and his church.

IV. She calls upon those who had a particular share in the advantages of this great salvation to offer up particular thanks to God for it, *v. 10, 11.* Let every man speak as he found of the goodness of God in this happy change of the posture of public affairs. 1. *You that ride on white asses, that is, the nobility and gentry.* Horses were little used in that country; they had, it is probable, a much better breed of asses than we have; but persons of quality, it seems, were distinguished by the colour of the asses they rode on; the white being more rare were therefore more valued. Notice is taken of Abdon's sons and grandsons riding on ass-colts, as indicating them to be men of distinction, *ch. xii. 14.* Let such as are by this salvation restored, not only to their liberty as other Israelites, but to their dignity, speak God's praises. 2. Let those that *sit in judgment* be sensible of it, and thankful for it as a very great mercy, that they may sit safely there, that the sword of justice is not struck out of their hand by the sword of war. 3. Let those that *walk by the way*, and meet with none there to make them afraid, speak to themselves in pious meditations, and to their fellow-travellers in religious discourses, of the goodness of God in ridding the roads of those banditti that had so long infested them. 4. Let those that draw in peace, and have not their wells taken from them, or stopped up, nor are in danger of being caught by the enemy when they go forth to draw, there, where they find themselves so much more safe and easy than they have been, *there let them rehearse the acts of the Lord, not Deborah's acts, nor Barak's, but the Lord's, taking notice of his hand making peace in their borders, and creating a defence upon all the glory. This is the Lord's doing.* Observe in these acts of his, (1.) Justice executed on his daring enemies. They are the righteous acts of the Lord. See him pleading a righteous cause, and sitting in the throne judging aright, and give him glory as the Judge of all the earth. (2.) Kindness shown to his trembling people, *the inhabitants of the villages, who lay most open to the enemy, had suffered most, and were most in danger, Ezek. xxxviii. 11.* It is the glory of God to protect those that are most exposed, and to help the weakest. Let us all take notice of the share we in par-

ticular have in the public peace and tranquillity, the inhabitants of the villages especially, and give God the praise of it.

12 Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. 13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. 14 Out of Ephraim *was there* a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. 15 And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great thoughts of heart. 16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great searchings of heart. 17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. 18 Zebulun and Naphtali *were* a people *that* jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. 19 The kings came *and fought*, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. 20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. 21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. 22 Then were the horse-hoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones. 23 Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Here, 1. Deborah stirs up herself and Barak to celebrate this victory in the most solemn manner, to the glory of God and the honour of Israel, for the encouragement of their friends and the greater confusion of their enemies, *v. 12.* 1. Deborah, as a pro-

phetess, must do it by a song, to compose and sing which she excites herself: *Awake, awake*, and again, *awake, awake*, which intimates the sense she had of the excellency and difficulty of the work; it needed and well deserved the utmost liveliness and vigour of soul in the performance of it; all the powers and faculties of the soul in their closest intensity and application ought to be employed in it. Thus too she expresses the sense she had of her own infirmity, and aptness to flag and remit in her zeal in this work. Note, Praising God is work that we should awake to, and awake ourselves to, Ps. cviii. 2. Barak, as a general, must do it by a triumph: *Lead thy captivity captive*. Though the army of Sisera was cut off in the field, and no quarter given, yet we may suppose in the prosecution of the victory, when the war was carried into the enemy's country, many not found in arms were seized and made prisoners of war. These she would have led in chains after Barak, when he made his public entry into his own city, to grace his triumphs; not as if it should be any pleasure to him to trample upon his fellow-creatures, but thus he must give glory to God, and serve that great purpose of his government which is to *look upon those that are proud and to abase them*.

II. She gives good reason for this praise and triumph, v. 13. This glorious victory had made the remnant of Israel, and Deborah in particular, look very great, a circumstance which they owed entirely to God. 1. The Israelites had become few and inconsiderable, and yet to them God gave dominion over nobles. Many of them were cut off by the enemy, many died of grief, and perhaps some had removed their families and effects into foreign parts; yet those few that remained, by divine assistance, with one brave and generous effort, not only shook off the yoke of oppression from their own neck, but got power over their oppressors. As long as any of God's Israel remain (and a remnant God will have in the worst of times) there is hope, be it ever so small a remnant, for God can make him that remains, though it should be but one single person, triumph over the most proud and potent. 2. Deborah was herself of the weaker sex, and the sex that from the fall had been sentenced to subjection, and yet the Lord that is himself higher than the highest authorized her to rule over the mighty men of Israel, who willingly submitted to her direction, and enabled her to triumph over the mighty men of Canaan, who fell before the army she commanded; so wonderfully did he *advance the low estate of his handmaid*. "The Lord made me, a woman, to have dominion over mighty men." A despised stone is made *head of the corner*. *This is indeed the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes*.

III. She makes particular remarks on the several parties concerned in this great action,

taking notice who fought against them, who fought for them, and who stood neuter.

1. Who fought against them. The power of the enemy must be taken notice of, that the victory may appear the more glorious. Jabin and Sisera had been mentioned in the history, but here it appears further, (1.) That Amalek was in league with Jabin, and sent him in assistance, or endeavoured to do it. Ephraim is here said to act against Amalek (v. 14), probably intercepting and cutting off some forces of the Amalekites that were upon their march to join Sisera. Amalek had helped Moab to oppress Israel (*ch. iii. 13*) and now had helped Jabin; they were inveterate enemies to God's people—their hand had always been *against the throne of the Lord* (Exod. xvii. 16); and therefore they were the more dangerous. (2.) That others of the kings of Canaan, who had somewhat recovered themselves since their defeat by Joshua, joined with Jabin, and strengthened his army with their forces, having the same implacable enmity to Israel that he had, and those kingdoms, when they were in their strength, having been subject to that of Hazor, Josh. xi. 10. These kings *came and fought*, v. 19. Israel had no king; their enemies had many, whose power and influence, especially acting in confederacy, made them very formidable; and yet Israel, having the Lord for their King, was too hard for them all. It is said of these kings that *they took no gain of money*, they were not mercenary troops hired into the service of Jabin (such often fail in an extremity), but they were volunteers, and hearty in the cause against Israel: they *desired not the riches of silver*, so the Chaldee, but only the satisfaction of helping to ruin Israel. Acting upon this principle, they were the more formidable, and would be the more cruel.

2. Who fought for them. The several tribes that assisted in this great exploit are here spoken of with honour; for, though God is chiefly to be glorified, instruments must have their due praise, for the encouragement of others: but, after all, it was heaven that turned the scale.

(1.) Ephraim and Benjamin, those tribes among whom Deborah herself lived, bestirred themselves, and did bravely, by her influence upon them; for her palm-tree was in the tribe of Ephraim, and very near to that of Benjamin (v. 14): *Out of Ephraim was there a root*, and life in the root, against Amalek. There was in Ephraim a mountain called *the mount of Amalek*, mentioned, *ch. xii. 15*, which, some think, is here meant, and some read it, *there was a root in Amalek*, that is, in that mountain, a strong resolution in the minds of that people to make head against the oppressors, which was the root of the matter. Herein Benjamin had set them a good example among his people. "Ephraim moved *after thee, Benjamin*;" though Benjamin was the junior tribe, and much in-

ferior, especially at this time, to Ephraim, both in number and wealth, yet when they led Ephraim followed in appearing for the common cause. If we be not so bold as to lead, yet we must not be so proud and sullen as not to follow even our inferiors in a good work. Ephraim was at a distance from the place of action, and therefore could not send forth many of its boughs to the service; but Deborah, who was one of them, knew there was a root of them, that they were hearty well-wishers to the cause. Dr. Lightfoot gives quite another sense of this. Joshua, of Ephraim, had been a root of such victories against Amalek (Exod xvii.), and Ehud of Benjamin lately against Amalek and Moab.

(2.) The ice being broken by Ephraim and Benjamin, Machir (the half-tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan) and Zebulun sent in men that were very serviceable to this great design. When an army is to be raised, especially under such disadvantages as Balak now experienced from the long disuse of arms and the dispiritedness of the people, it is of great consequence to be furnished, [1.] With men of courage for officers, and such the family of Machir furnished them with, for thence came down *governors*. The children of Machir were particularly famous for their valour in Moses's time (Num. xxxii. 39), and it seems it continued in their family, the more because they were seated in the frontiers. [2.] With men of learning and ingenuity for secretaries of war, and with such they were supplied out of Zebulun: thence came men *that handle the pen of the writer*, clerks that issued out orders, wrote circular letters, drew commissions, mustered their men, and kept their accounts. Thus must every man, *according as he has received the gift, minister the same*, for the public good (1 Pet. iv. 10); the eyes see, and the ears hear, for the whole body. I know it is generally understood of the forwardness even of the scholars of this tribe, who studied the law and expounded it, to take up arms in this cause, though they were better skilled in books than in the art of war. So Sir Richard Blackmore paraphrases it:—

The scribes of Zebulun and learned men,  
To wield the sword, laid down the pen.

(3.) Issachar did good service too; though he saw *that rest was good*, and therefore bowed his shoulder to bear, which is the character of that tribe (Gen. xlix. 15), yet they disdained to bear the yoke of Jabin's tribute, and now preferred the generous toils of war to a servile rest. Though it should seem there were not many common soldiers enlisted out of that tribe, yet *the princes of Issachar were with Deborah and Barak* (v. 15), probably, as a great council of war to advise upon emergencies. And, it should seem, these princes of Issachar did in person accompany Barak into the field of battle. Did he go on foot? They footed it with him, not consulting their honour or ease. Did he go into

the valley, the place of most danger? They exposed themselves with him, and were still at his right hand to advise him: for the men of Issachar were men that *had understanding of the times*, 1 Chron. xii. 32.

(4.) Zebulun and Naphtali were the most bold and active of all the tribes, not only out of a particular affection to Barak their countryman, but because, they lying nearest to Jabin, the yoke of oppression lay heavier on their necks than on those of any other tribe. Better die in honour than live in bondage; and therefore, in a pious zeal for God and their country, they *jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field*, v. 18. With what heroic bravery did they charge and push on even upon the chariots of iron, despising danger, and setting death itself at defiance in so good a cause!

(5.) The stars from heaven appeared, or acted at least, on Israel's side (v. 20): *The stars in their courses*, according to the order and direction of him who is the great Lord of their hosts, *fought against Sisera*, by their malignant influences, or by causing the storms of hail and thunder which contributed so much to the rout of Sisera's army. The Chaldee reads it, *from heaven, from the place where the stars go forth, war was waged against Sisera*, that is, the power of the God of heaven was engaged against him, making use of the ministration of the angels of heaven. Some way or other, the heavenly bodies (not arrested, as when the sun stood still at Joshua's word, but going on in their courses) fought against Sisera. Those whom God is an enemy to the whole creation is at war with. Perhaps the flashes of lightning by which the stars fought was that which frightened the horses, so as that they pranced till their very hoofs were broken (v. 22), and probably overturned the chariots of iron which they drew or turned them back upon their owners.

(6.) The river of Kishon fought against their enemies. It swept away multitudes of those that hoped to make their escape through it, v. 21. Ordinarily, it was but a shallow river, and, being in their own country, we may suppose they well knew its fords and safest passages, and yet now, probably by the great rain that fell, it was so swollen, and the stream so deep and strong, that those who attempted to pass it were drowned, being feeble and faint, and unable to make their way through it. And then were the horse-hoofs broken by means of the *plungings*. So it is in the margin, v. 22. The river of Kishon is called *that ancient river* because described or celebrated by ancient historians or poets, or rather because it was designed of old, in the counsel of God, to serve his purposes against Sisera at this time, and did so, as if it had been made on purpose; thus *the water of the old pool* God is said to have fashioned long ago for that use to which it was put, Isa. xxii. 11.

(7.) Deborah's own soul fought against

them; she speaks of it with a holy exultation (v. 21): *O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength*. She did it by exciting others to do it, and assisting them, which she did with all her heart. Also by her prayers; as Moses conquered Amalek by lifting up his hand, so Deborah vanquished Sisera by lifting up her heart. And when the soul is employed in holy exercises, and heart-work is made of them, through the grace of God the strength of our spiritual enemies will be trodden down and will fall before us.

3. In this great engagement she observes who stood *neuter*, and did not side with Israel as might have been expected. It is strange to find how many, even of those who were called Israelites, basely deserted this glorious cause and declined to appear. No mention is made of Judah nor Simeon among the tribes concerned, because they, lying so very remote from the scene of action, had not an opportunity to appear, and therefore it was not expected from them; but for those that lay near, and yet would not venture, indelible marks of disgrace are here put upon them, as they deserved.

(1.) Reuben basely declined the service, v. 15, 16. Justly had he long ago been deprived of the privileges of the birth-right, and still does his dying father's doom stick by him: *unstable as water, he shall not excel*. Two things hindered them from engaging:— [1.] Their divisions. This jarring string she twice strikes upon to their shame: *For the divisions of Reuben* (or in these divisions) *there were great thoughts, impressions, and searchings of heart*. Not only for their division from Canaan by the river Jordan, which needed not to have hindered them had they been hearty in the cause, for Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and yet from Machir of Gilead came down governors; but it means either that they were divided among themselves, could not agree who should go or who should lead, each striving to gain the posts of honour and shun those of danger, some unhappy contests in their tribe kept them from uniting together, and with their brethren, for the common good, or that they were divided in their opinion of this war from the rest of the tribes, thought the attempt either not justifiable or not practicable, and therefore blamed those that engaged in it and did themselves decline it. This occasioned great searchings of heart among the rest, especially when they had reason to suspect that, whatever Reuben pretended, his sitting still now proceeded from a cooling of his affections to his brethren and an alienation of mind from them, which occasioned them many sad thoughts. It grieves us to see our mother's children angry with us for doing our duty and looking strange upon us when we most need their friendship and assistance. [2.] Their business in the world: *Reuben abode among the sheepfolds*, a warmer and safer place than the camp, pretending they

could not conveniently leave the sheep they tended; he loved to *hear the bleatings of the flocks*, or, as some read it, the *whistlings of the flocks*, the music which the shepherds made with their oaten reeds or pipes, and the pastorals which they sung: these Reuben preferred before the martial drum and trumpet. Thus many are kept from doing their duty by the fear of trouble, the love of ease, and an inordinate affection to their worldly business and advantage. Narrow selfish spirits care not what becomes of the interests of God's church, so they can but get, keep, and save money. *All seek their own*, Phil. ii. 21.

(2.) Dan and Asher did the same, v. 17. These two lay on the sea-coast, and, [1.] Dan pretended he could not leave his ships but they would be exposed, and therefore *I pray thee have me excused*. Those of that tribe perhaps pleaded that their sea-trade dis fitted them for land-service and diverted them from it; but Zebulun also was a haven for ships, a sea-faring tribe, and yet was forward and active in this expedition. There is no excuse we make to shift off duty but what some or other have broken through and set aside, whose courage and resolution will rise up against us and shame us. [2.] Asher pretended he must stay at home to repair the breaches which the sea had in some places made upon his land, and to fortify his works against the encroachments of it, or he abode in his creeks, or small havens, where his trading vessels lay to attend them. A little thing will serve those for a pretence to stay at home who have no mind to engage in the most necessary services because there are difficulty and danger in them.

(3.) But above all Meroz is condemned, and a curse pronounced upon the inhabitants of it, *Because they came not to the help of the Lord*, v. 23. Probably this was some city that lay near the scene of action, and therefore the inhabitants had a fair opportunity of showing their obedience to God and their concern for Israel, and of doing good service to the common cause; but they basely declined it, for fear of Jabin's iron chariots, being willing to sleep in a whole skin. The Lord needed not their help; he made it to appear he could do his work without them, but no thanks to them: for aught they knew the attempt might have miscarried for want of their hand, and therefore they are cursed for *not coming to the help of the Lord*, when it was in effect proclaimed, *Who is on the Lord's side?* The cause between God and the mighty (the principalities and powers of the kingdom of darkness) will not admit or neutrality. God looks upon those as against him that are not with him. This curse is pronounced by the *angel of the Lord*, our Lord Jesus, the captain of the Lord's host (and those whom he curses are cursed in deed), and further than we have warrant and authority from him we may not curse. He that will richly reward all his good soldiers



will certainly and severely punish all cowards and deserters. This city of Meroz seems to have been at this time a considerable place, since something great was expected from it; but probably, after the angel of the Lord had pronounced this curse upon it, it dwindled, and, like the fig-tree which Christ cursed, withered away, so that we never read of it after this in scripture.

24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. 25 He asked water, and she gave *him* milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. 26 She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. 27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead. 28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? 29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, 30 Have they not sped? have they *not* divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, *meet* for the necks of *them that take* the spoil? 31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but *let* them that love him *be* as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Deborah here concludes this triumphant song.

I. With the praises of Jael, her sister-heroine, whose valiant act had completed and crowned the victory. She had mentioned her before (v. 6) as one that would have served her country if it had been in her power; now she applauds her as one that did serve it admirably well when it was in her power. Her poetry is finest and most florid here in the latter end of the song. How honourably does she speak of Jael (v. 24), who preferred her peace with the God of Israel before her peace with the king of Canaan, and though not a native of Israel (for aught that appears) yet heartily espoused the cause of Israel in this critical conjunc-

ture, jeoparded her life as truly as if she had been in the high places of the field, and bravely fought for those whom she saw God fought for! *Blessed shall she be above women in the tent.* Note, Those whose lot is cast in the tent, in a very low and narrow sphere of activity, if they serve God in that according to their capacity, shall in no wise lose their reward. Jael in the tent wins as rich a blessing as Barak in the field. Nothing is more confounding, grievous, and shameful, than disappointment, and Deborah here does most elegantly describe two great disappointments, the shame of which was typical of sinners' everlasting shame.

1. Sisera found a fatal enemy where he expected a firm and faithful friend. (1.) Jael showed him the kindness of a friend, and perhaps at that time intended no other than kindness, until God, by an immediate impulse upon her mind (which impulses then were to be regarded, and carried so much of their own evidence with them that they might be relied upon, but cannot now be pretended to), directed her to do otherwise, v. 25. He asked only for fair water to quench his thirst, but she, not only to show her housewifery and good housekeeping, but to express her respect to him, *gave him milk and brought forth butter*, that is (say some interpreters), milk which had the butter taken from it; we call it butter-milk. No (say others), it was milk that had the butter still in it; we call it cream. Whichsoever it was, it was probably the best her house afforded; and, to set it off, she brought it *in a lordly dish*, such as she called so, the finest she had, and better than she ordinarily used at her own table. This confirmed Sisera's opinion of her friendship, and made him sleep the faster and the more secure. But, (2.) She proved his mortal enemy, gave him his death's stroke: it is curiously described, v. 26, 27. [1.] How great does Jael look, *hammering Sisera*, as it is in the margin, mauling that proud man who had been so long the terror of the mighty, and sending him down slain to the pit with *his iniquities upon his bones!* Ezek. xxxii. 27. She seems to have gone about it with no more terror nor concern than if she had been going to nail one of the boards or bars of her tent, so confident was she of divine aid and protection. We read it she *smote off his head*, probably with his own sword, which, now that his head was nailed through, she durst take from his side, but not before, for fear of waking him. But because there was no occasion for cutting off his head, nor was it mentioned in the history, many think it should be read, *she struck through his head*. That head which had been proudly lifted up against God and Israel, and in which had been forged bloody designs for the destruction of God's people, Jael finds a soft place in, and into that with a good will strikes her nail. [2.] How mean does Sisera look, fallen at Jael's feet! v. 27.

At the feet of this female executioner he bowed, he fell; all his struggles for life availed not; she followed her blow until he fell down dead. There lies extended the deserted carcase of that proud man, not on the bed of honour, not in the high places of the field, not having any glorious wound to show from a glittering sword, or a how of steel, but in the corner of a tent, at the feet of a woman, with a disgraceful wound by a sorry nail struck through his head. Thus is shame the fate of proud men. And this is a very lively representation of the ruin of those sinners whose prosperity slays them; it flatters and caresses them with milk and butter in a lordly dish, as if it would make them easy and happy, but it nails their heads and hearts too to the ground in earthly-mindedness, and pierces them through with many sorrows; its flatteries are fatal, and sink them at last into destruction and perdition, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

2. Sisera's mother had the tidings brought her of her son's fall and ruin when she was big with expectation of his glorious and triumphant return, r. 28—30, where we have, (1.) Her fond desire to see her son come back in triumph: *Why is his chariot so long in coming?* She speaks this, not so much out of a concern for his safety, or any jealousy of his having miscarried (she had no fear of that, so confident was she of his success), but out of a longing for his glory, which with a feminine weakness she was passionately impatient to see, chiding the lingering chariot, and expostulating concerning the delays of it, little thinking that her unhappy son had been, before this, forced to quit that chariot which they were so proud of, and which she thought came so slowly. *The chariots of his glory had now become the shame of his house*, Isa. xxii. 18. Let us take heed of indulging such desires as these towards any temporal good thing, particularly towards that which cherishes vain-glory, for this was what she here doted on. Eagerness and impatience in our desires do us a great deal of prejudice, and make it intolerable to us to be crossed. But towards the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the glories of that day, we should thus stand affected (*Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*), for here we cannot be disappointed. (2.) Her foolish hope and confidence that he would come at last in so much the greater pomp. Her wise ladies answered her, and thought they gave a very good account of the delay; yea, she (*in her wisdom*, says the Chaldee) tauntingly made answer to herself, "*Have they not sped?*" No doubt they have, and that which delays them is that they are *dividing the prey*, which is so much that it is a work of time to make a distribution of it." In the spoil they pleased themselves with the thought of, observe, [1.] How impudently, and to the reproach and scandal of their sex, these ladies boast of the multitude of damsels which the soldiers

would have the abusing of. [2.] How childishly they pleased themselves with the hope of seeing Sisera himself in a gaudy mantle of *divers colours*; how charmingly would it look! *of divers colours of needle-work*, plundered out of the wardrobe of some Israelitish lady; it is repeated again, as that which pleased their fancy above any thing, *of divers colours of needle-work on both sides*, and therefore very rich; such pieces of embroidery they hoped Sisera would have to present his mother and the ladies with. Thus apt are we to deceive ourselves with great expectations and confident hopes of honour, and pleasure, and wealth in this world, by which we prepare for ourselves the shame and grief of a disappointment. And thus does God often bring ruin on his enemies when they are most elevated.

II. She concludes all with a prayer to God, 1. For the destruction of all his foes: "*So, so shamefully, so miserably, let all thy enemies perish, O Lord*; let all that hope to triumph in Israel's ruin be thus disappointed and triumphed over. *Do to them all as unto Sisera*," Ps. lxxxiii. 9. Though our enemies are to be prayed for, God's enemies, as such, are to be prayed against; and, when we see some of God's enemies remarkably humbled and brought down, this is an encouragement to us to pray for the downfall of all the rest. Deborah was a prophetess, and this prayer was a prediction that in due time all God's enemies shall perish, Ps. xcii. 9. None ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. 2. For the exaltation and comfort of all his friends. "*But let those that love him, and heartily wish well to his kingdom among men, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength*; let them shine so bright, appear so glorious in the eye of the world, cast such benign influences, be as much out of the reach of their enemies, who curse the rising sun because it scorches them; let them *rejoice as a strong man to run a race*, Ps. xix. 5. Let them, as burning and shining lights in their places, dispel the mists of darkness, and shine with more and more lustre and power *unto the perfect day*," Prov. iv. 18. Such shall be the honour, and such the joy, of all that love God in sincerity, and for ever they shall *shine as the sun in the firmament of our Father*.

The victory here celebrated with this song was of such happy consequence to Israel that for the best part of one age they enjoyed the peace which it opened the way to: *The land had rest forty years*, that is, so long it was from this victory to the raising up of Gideon. And well would it have been if, when the churches and the tribes had rest, they had been edified, and had walked in the fear of the Lord.

#### CHAP. VI.

Nothing that occurred in the quiet and peaceable times of Israel is recorded; the forty years' rest after the conquest of Jabin is passed over in silence; and here begins the story of another distress and another deliverance, by Gideon, the fourth of the judges. Here is, 1. The calamitous condition of Israel, by the increase of

the Midianites, ver. 1-6. 11. The message God sent them by a prophet, by convincing them of sin, to prepare them for deliverance, ver. 7-10. 11. The raising up of Gideon to be their deliverer. 1. A commission which God sent him by the hand of an angel, and confirmed by a sign, ver. 11-24. 2. The first-fruits of his government in the reform of his father's house, ver. 25-32. 3. The preparations he made for a war with the Midianites, and the encouragement given him by a sign, ver. 33-46.

AND the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. 2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. 3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; 4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. 5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. 6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

We have here, I. Israel's sin renewed: *They did evil in the sight of the Lord, v. 1.* The burnt child dreads the fire; yet this perverse unthinking people, that had so often smarted sorely for their idolatry, upon a little respite of God's judgments return to it again. *This people hath a revolting rebellious heart,* not kept in awe by the terror of God's judgments, nor engaged in honour and gratitude by the great things he had done for them to keep themselves in his love. The providence of God will not change the hearts and lives of sinners.

11. Israel's troubles repeated. This would follow of course; let all that sin expect to suffer; let all that return to folly expect to return to misery. *With the froward God will show himself froward* (Ps. xviii. 26), and will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him, Lev. xxvi. 21, 24. Now as to this trouble, 1. It arose from a very despicable enemy. God delivered them into the hand of Midian (v. 1), not Midian in the south where Jethro lived, but Midian in the east that joined to Moab (Num. xxii. 4), a people that all men despised as uncultivated and unintelligent; hence we read not here of any kmg, lord, or general, that they had, but the

force with which they destroyed Israel was an undisciplined mob; and, which made it the more grievous, they were a people that Israel had formerly subdued, and in a manner destroyed (see Num. xxxi. 7), and yet by this time (nearly 200 years after) the poor remains of them were so multiplied, and so magnified, that they were capable of being made a very severe scourge to Israel. Thus *God moved them to jealousy with those who were not a people, even a foolish nation, Deut. xxxii. 21.* The meanest creature will serve to chastise those that have made the great Creator their enemy. And, when those we are authorized to rule prove rebellious and disobedient to us, it concerns us to enquire whether we have not been so to our sovereign Ruler. 2. It arose to a very formidable height (v. 2): *The hand of Midian prevailed, purely by their multitude.* God had promised to increase Israel as the sand on the sea shore; but their sin stopped their growth and diminished them, and then their enemies, though otherwise every way inferior to them, overpowered them with numbers. They came upon them as *grasshoppers for multitude* (v. 5), not in a regular army to engage them in the field, but in a confused swarm to plunder the country. quarter themselves upon it, and enrich themselves with its spoils—bands of robbers, and no better. And sinful Israel, being separated by sin from God, had not spirit to make head against them. Observe the wretched havoc that these Midianites made with their bands of plunderers in Israel. Here we have, (1.) The Israelites imprisoned, or rather imprisoning themselves, in dens and caves, v. 2. This was owing purely to their own timorousness and faint-heartedness, that they would rather fly than fight; it was the effect of a guilty conscience, which made them tremble at the shaking of a leaf, and the just punishment of their apostasy from God, who thus fought against them with those very terrors with which he would otherwise have fought for them. Had it not been for this, we cannot but think Israel a match for the Midianites, and able enough to make head against them: but the heart that departs from God is lost, not only to that which is good, but to that which is great. Sin dispirits men, and makes them sneak into dens and caves. The day will come when chief captains and mighty men will call in vain to rocks and mountains to hide them. (2.) The Israelites impoverished, greatly impoverished, v. 6. The Midianites and the other children of the east that joined with them to live by spoil and rapine (as long before the Sabeans and Chaldeans did that plundered Job, free-booters) made frequent incursions into the land of Canaan. This fruitful land was a great temptation to them; and the sloth and luxury into which the Israelites had sunk by forty years' rest made them and their substance an easy prey to them. They came up against them (v. 3), pitched their camps among them (v. 4), and

brought their cattle with them, particularly camels innumerable (v. 5), not a flying party to make a sally upon them and be gone presently, but they resolved to force their way, and penetrated through the heart of the country as far as Gaza on the western side, r. 4. They let the Israelites alone to sow their ground, but towards harvest they came and seized all, and ate up and destroyed it, both grass and corn, and when they went away took with them the sheep and oxen, so that in short they left no sustenance for Israel, except what was privately taken by the rightful owners into the dens and caves. Now here we may see, [1.] The justice of God in the punishment of their sin. They had neglected to honour God with their substance in tithes and offerings, and had prepared that for Baal with which God should have been served, and now God justly sends an enemy to take it away *in the season thereof*, Hos. ii. 8, 9. [2.] The consequence of God's departure from a people; when he goes all good goes and all mischiefs break in. When Israel kept in with God, they reaped what others sowed (Josh. xxiv. 13; Ps. cv. 44); but now that God had forsaken them others reaped what they sowed. Let us take occasion from this to bless God for our national peace and tranquillity, that we *eat the labour of our hands*.

III. Israel's sense of God's hand revived at last. Seven years, year after year, did the Midianites make these inroads upon them, each we may suppose worse than the other (r. 1), until at last, all other succours failing, *Israel cried unto the Lord* (v. 6), for crying to Baal ruined them, and would not help them. When God judges he will overcome; and sinners shall be made either to bend or break before him.

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, 8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; 9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; 10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Observe here, I. The cognizance God took of the cries of Israel, when at length they were directed towards him. Though in their prosperity they had neglected him and made

court to his rivals, and though they never looked towards him until they were driven to it by extremity, yet, upon their complaint and prayer, he intended relief for them. Thus would he show how ready he is to forgive, how swift he is to show mercy, and how inclinable to hear prayer, that sinners may be encouraged to return and repent, Ps. cxxx. 4.

II. The method God took of working deliverance for them.

1. Before he sent an angel to raise them up a saviour he sent a prophet to reprove them for sin, and to bring them to repentance, r. 8. This prophet is not named, but he was a man, a prophet, not an angel, as *ch. ii. 1*. Whether this prophet took an opportunity of delivering his message to the children of Israel when they had met together in a general assembly, at some solemn feast or other great occasion, or whether he went from city to city and from tribe to tribe, preaching to this purport, is not certain; but his errand was to convince them of sin, that, in their crying to the Lord, they might confess that with sorrow and shame, and not spend their breath in only complaining of their trouble. They cried to God for a deliverer, and God sent them a prophet to instruct them, and to make them ready for deliverance. Note, (1.) We have reason to hope God is designing mercy for us if we find he is by his grace preparing us for it. If to those that are sick he sends a messenger, an interpreter, by whom he *shows unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious*, and grants a recovery, Job xxxiii. 23, 24. (2.) The sending of prophets to a people, and the furnishing of a land with faithful ministers, is a token for good, and an evidence that God has mercy in store for them. He thus turns us to him, and then causes his face to shine, Ps. lxxx. 19.

2. We have here the heads of the message which this prophet delivered in to Israel, in the name of the Lord.

(1.) He sets before them the great things God had done for them (v. 8, 9): *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*; they had worshipped the gods of the nations, as if they had had no God of their own to worship and therefore might choose whom they pleased; but they are here reminded of one whom they had forgotten, who was known by the title of *the God of Israel*, and to him they must return. They had turned to other gods, as if their own had been either incapable or unwilling to protect them, and therefore they are told what he did for their fathers, in whose loins they were, the benefit of which descended and still remained to this their ungrateful seed. [1.] He brought them out of Egypt, where otherwise they would have continued in perpetual poverty and slavery. [2.] He delivered them out of the hands of all that oppressed them; this is mentioned to intimate that the reason why they were not now delivered out of the hands of the oppressing

Midianites was not for want of any power or good-will in God, but because by their iniquity they had sold themselves, and God would not redeem them until they by repentance revoked the bargain. [3.] He put them in quiet possession of this good laud; this not only aggravated their sin, and affixed the brand of base ingratitude to it, but it justified God, and cleared him from blame upon account of the trouble they were now in. They could not say he was unkind, for he had given all possible proofs of his designing well for them; if ill befel them notwithstanding, they must thank themselves.

(2.) He shows the easiness and equity of God's demands and expectations from them (c. 10): "*I am the Lord your God, to whom you lie under the highest obligations, fear not the gods of the Amorites,*" that is, "do not worship them, nor show any respect to them; do not worship them for fear of their doing you any hurt, for what hurt can they do you while I am your God? Fear God, and you need not fear them."

(3.) He charges them with rebellion against God, who had laid this injunction upon them: *But you have not obeyed my voice.* The charge is short, but very comprehensive; this was the malignity of all their sin, it was disobedience to God; and therefore it was this that brought those calamities upon them under which they were now groaning, pursuant to the threatenings annexed to his commands. He intends hereby to bring them to repentance; and our repentance is then right and genuine when the sinfulness of sin, as disobedience to God, is that in it which we chiefly lament.

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which *was* in Ophrah, that *pertained* unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the wine-press, to hide *it* from the Midianites. 12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD *is* with thee, thou mighty man of valour. 13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where *be* all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. 14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? 15 And he said unto him Oh my

Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family *is* poor in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house. 16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. 17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. 18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set *it* before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. 19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought *it* out unto him under the oak, and presented *it*. 20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay *them* upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that *was* in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. 22 And when Gideon perceived that he *was* an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. 23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace *be* unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. 24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it *is* yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

It is not said what effect the prophet's sermon had upon the people, but we may hope it had a good effect, and that some of them at least repented and reformed upon it; for here, immediately after, we have the dawning of the day of their deliverance, by the effectual calling of Gideon to take upon him the command of their forces against the Midianites.

1. The person to be commissioned for this service was Gideon, the son of Joash, v. 14. The father was now living, but he was passed by, and this honour put upon the son, for the father kept up in his own family the worship

of Baal (v. 25), which we may suppose this son, as far as was in his power, witnessed against. He was of the half tribe of Manasseh that lay in Canaan, of the family of Abiezer; the eldest house of that tribe, Josh. xvii. 2. Hitherto the judges were raised up out of that tribe which suffered most by the oppression, and probably it was so here.

II. The person that gave him the commission was an *angel of the Lord*; it should seem not a created angel, but the Son of God himself, the eternal Word, the Lord of the angels, who then appeared upon some great occasions in human shape, as a prelude (says the learned bishop Patrick) to what he intended in the fulness of time, when he would take our nature upon him, as we say, for good and all. This angel is here called *Jehovah*, the incommunicable name of God (r. 14, 16), and he said, *I will be with thee*.

1. This divine person appeared here to Gideon, and it is observable how he found him, (1.) Retired—all alone. God often manifests himself to his people when they are out of the noise and hurry of this world. Silence and solitude befriend our communion with God. (2.) Employed in threshing wheat, with a *staff* or *rod* (so the word signifies), such as they used in beating out fitches and cummin (Isa. xxviii. 27), but now used for wheat, probably because he had but little to thresh, he needed not the oxen to tread it out. It was not then looked upon as any diminution to him, though he was a person of some account and a *mighty man of valour*, to lay his hand to the business of the husbandman. He had many servants (r. 27), and yet would not himself live in idleness. We put ourselves in the way of divine visits when we employ ourselves in honest business. Tidings of Christ's birth were brought to the shepherds when they were keeping their flocks. The work he was about was an emblem of that greater work to which he was now to be called, as the disciples' fishing was. From threshing corn he is fetched to thresh the Midianites, Isa. xli. 15. (3.) Distressed; he was threshing his wheat, not in the threshing-floor, the proper place, but *by the wine-press*, in some private unsuspected corner, for fear of the Midianites. He himself shared in the common calamity, and now the angel came to animate him against Midian when he himself could speak so feelingly of the heaviness of their yoke. The day of the greatest distress is God's time to appear for his people's relief.

2. Let us now see what passed between the angel and Gideon, who knew not with certainty, till after he was gone, that he was an angel, but supposed he was a prophet.

(1.) The angel accosted him with respect, and assured him of the presence of God with him, r. 12. He calls him a *mighty man of valour*, perhaps because he observed how he threshed his corn with all his might; and saith thou a man diligent in his business?

whatever his business is, he shall *stand before kings*. He that is faithful in a few things shall be ruler over many. Gideon was a man of a brave active spirit, and yet buried alive in obscurity, through the iniquity of the times; but he is here animated to undertake something great, like himself, with that word, *the Lord is with thee*, or, as the Chaldee reads it, *the Word of the Lord is thy help*. It was very sure that the Lord was with him when this angel was with him. By this word, [1.] He gives him his commission. If we have God's presence with us, this will justify us and bear us out in our undertakings. [2.] He inspires him with all necessary qualifications for the execution of his commission. "The Lord is with thee to guide and strengthen thee, to animate and support thee." [3.] He assures him of success; for, *if God be for us, who can prevail against us?* If he be with us, nothing can be wanting to us. The presence of God with us is all in all to our prosperity, whatever we do. Gideon was a mighty man of valour, and yet he could bring nothing to pass without the presence of God, and that presence is enough to make any man mighty in valour and to give a man courage at any time.

(2.) Gideon gave a very melancholy answer to this joyful salutation (r. 13): *O my Lord! if the Lord be with us* (which the Chaldee reads, *Is the Shechinah of the Lord our help?*) making that the same with the *Word of the Lord* why then has all this befallen us? "all this trouble and distress from the Midianites' incursions, which force me to thresh wheat here by the wine-press—all this loss, and grief, and fright; and *where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of?*" Observe, In his reply he regards not the praise of his own valour, nor does this in the least elevate him or give him any encouragement, though it is probable the angel adapted what he said to that which Gideon was at the same time thinking of; while his labouring hands were employed about his wheat, his working head and daring heart were meditating Israel's rescue and Midian's ruin, with which thought he that knows the heart seasonably sets in, calls him a man of valour for his brave projects, and opens him a way to put them in execution; yet Gideon, as if not conscious to himself of any thing great or encouraging in his own spirit, fastens only on the assurance the angel had given him of God's presence, as that by which they held all their comfort. Observe, The angel spoke in particular to him: *The Lord is with thee*; but he expostulates for all: *If the Lord be with us*, herding himself with the thousands of Israel, and admitting no comfort but what they might be sharers in, so far is he from the thoughts of monopolizing it, though he had so fair an occasion given him. Note, Public spirits reckon that only an honour and joy to themselves which puts them in a capacity of serving the common interests

of God's church. Gideon was a mighty man of valour, but as yet weak in faith, which makes it hard to him to reconcile to the assurances now given him of the presence of God, [1.] The distress to which Israel was reduced: *Why has all this (and all this was no little) befallen us?* Note, It is sometimes hard, but never impossible, to reconcile cross providences with the presence of God and his favour. [2.] The delay of their deliverance: "*Where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of?*" Why does not the same power which delivered our fathers from the yoke of the Egyptians deliver us out of the hands of the Midianites?" As if because God did not immediately work miracles for their deliverance, though they had by their sins forfeited his favour and help, it must be questioned whether ever he had wrought the miracles which their fathers told them of, or, if he had, whether he had now the same wisdom, and power, and good-will to his people, that he had had formerly. This was his weakness. We must not expect that the miracles which were wrought when a church was in the forming, and some great truth in the settling, should be continued and repeated when the formation and settlement are completed: no, nor that the mercies God showed to our fathers that served him, and kept close to him, should be renewed to us, if we degenerate and revolt from him. Gideon ought not to have said either, *First*, That God had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, for by their iniquities they had sold themselves, or, *Secondly*, That now they were in their hands he had forsaken them, for he had lately sent them a prophet (v. 8), which was a certain indication that he had not forsaken them.

(3.) The angel gave him a very effectual answer to his objections, by giving him a commission to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, and assuring him of success therein, v. 14. Now the angel is called *Jehovah*, for he speaks as one having authority, and not as a messenger. [1.] There was something extraordinary in the look he now gave to Gideon; it was a gracious favourable look, which revived his spirits that drooped, and silenced his fears, such a look as that with which God's *countenance beholds the upright*, Ps. xi. 7. He looked upon him, and smiled at the objections he made, which he gave him no direct answer to, but girded and clothed him with such power as would shortly enable him to answer them himself, and make him ashamed that ever he had made them. It was a speaking look, like Christ's upon Peter (Luke xxii. 61), a powerful look, a look that strangely darted new light and life into Gideon's breast, and inspired him with a generous heat, far above what he felt before. [2.] But there was much more in what he said to him. *First*, He commissioned him to appear and act as Israel's deliverer. Such a one the few

thinking people in the nation, and Gideon among the rest, were now expecting to be raised up, according to God's former method, in answer to the cries of oppressed Israel; and now Gideon is told, "Thou art the man: *Go in this thy might*, this might wherewith thou art now threshing wheat; go and employ it to a nobler purpose; *I will make thee a thresher of men.*" Or, rather, "this might wherewith thou art now endued by this look." God gave him his commission by giving him all the qualifications that were necessary for the execution of it, which is more than the mightiest prince and potentate on earth can do for those to whom he gives commissions. God's fitting men for work is a sure and constant evidence of his calling them to it. "Go, not in thy might, that which is natural, and of thyself, depend not on thy own valour; but go in *this thy might*, this which thou hast now received, *go in the strength of the Lord God*, that is, the strength with which thou must strengthen thyself." *Secondly*, He assured him of success. This was enough to put courage into him; he might be confident he should not miscarry in the attempt; it should not turn either to his own disgrace or the damage of his people (as baffled enterprises do), but to his honour and their happiness: *Thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites*, and so shalt not only be an eye-witness, but a glorious instrument, of such wonders as thy fathers told thee of. Gideon, we may suppose, looked as one astonished at this strange and surprising power conferred upon him, and questions whether he may depend upon what he hears: the angel ratifies his commission with a *teste neipso*—an appeal to his own authority; there needed no more. "*Have not I commanded thee*—I that have all power in heaven and earth, and particular authority here as Israel's King, giving commissions immediately—I who am that I am, the same that sent Moses?" Exod. iii. 14.

(4.) Gideon made a very modest objection against this commission (v. 15): *O my Lord! wherewith shall I save Israel?* This question bespeaks him either, [1.] Distrustful of God and his power, as if, though God should be with him, yet it were impossible for him to save Israel. True faith is often weak, yet it shall not be rejected, but encouraged and strengthened. Or, [2.] Inquisitive concerning the methods he must take: "Lord, I labour under all imaginable disadvantages for it; if I must do it, thou must put me in the way." Note, Those who receive commissions from God must expect and seek for instructions from him. Or rather, [3.] Humble, self-diffident, and self-denying. The angel had honoured him, but see how meanly he speaks of himself: "My family is comparatively poor in Manasseh" (impoverished, it may be, more than other families by the Midianites), "and I am the least, that have the least honour and interest,

in my father's house; what can I pretend to do? I am utterly unfit for the service, and unworthy of the honour." Note, God often chooses to do great things by those that are little, especially that are so in their own eyes. God delights to advance the humble.

(5.) This objection was soon answered by a repetition of the promise that God would be with him, v. 16. "Object not thy poverty and meanness; such things have indeed often hindered men in great enterprises, but what are they to a man that has the presence of God with him, which will make up all the deficiencies of honour and estate. Surely I will be with thee, to direct and strengthen thee, and put such a reputation upon thee that, how weak soever thy personal interest is, thou shalt have soldiers enough to follow thee, and be assured *thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man*, as easily as if they were but one man and as effectually. All the thousands of Midian shall be as if they had but one neck, and thou shalt have the cutting of it off."

(6.) Gideon desires to have his faith confirmed touching this commission; for he would not be over-credulous of that which tended so much to his own praise, would not venture upon an undertaking so far above him, and in which he must engage many more, but he would be well satisfied himself of his authority, and would be able to give satisfaction to others as to him who gave him that authority. He therefore humbly begs of this divine person, whoever he was, [1.] That he would give him a sign, v. 17. And, the commission being given him out of the common road of providence, he might reasonably expect it should be confirmed by some act of God out of the common course of nature: "Show me a sign to assure me of the truth of this concerning which thou talkest with me, that it is something more than talk, and that thou art in earnest." Now, under the dispensation of the Spirit, we are not to expect signs before our eyes, such as Gideon here desired, but must earnestly pray to God that, if we have found grace in his sight, he would show us a sign in our heart, by the powerful operations of his Spirit there, fulfilling the work of faith, and perfecting what is lacking in it. [2.] In order hereunto, that he would accept of a treat, and so give him a further and longer opportunity of conversation with him, v. 18. Those who know what it is to have communion with God desire the continuance of it, and are loth to part, praying with Gideon, *Depart not hence, I pray thee*. That which Gideon desired in courting his stay was that he might bring out some provision of meat for this stranger. He did not take him into the house to entertain him there, perhaps because his father's house were not well affected to him and his friends, or because he desired still to be in private with this stranger, and to con-

verse with him alone (therefore he calls not for a servant to bring the provision, but fetches it himself), or because thus his father Abraham entertained angels unawares, not in his tent, but under a tree, Gen. xviii. 8. Upon the angel's promise to stay to dinner with him, he hastened to bring out a kid, which, it is likely, was ready boiled for his own dinner, so that in making it ready he had nothing to do but to put it in the basket (for here was no sauce to serve it up in, nor the dish garnished) and the broth in a vessel, and so he presented it, v. 19. Hereby he intended, *First*, To testify his grateful and generous respects to this stranger, and, in him, to God who sent him, as one that studied what he should render. He had pleaded the poverty of his family (v. 15) to excuse himself from being a general, but not here to excuse himself from being hospitable. Out of the little which the Midianites had left him he would gladly spare enough to entertain a friend, especially a messenger from heaven. *Secondly*, To try who and what this extraordinary person was. What he brought out is called his *present*, v. 18. It is the same word that is used for a meat-offering, and perhaps that word is used which signifies both because Gideon intended to leave it to this divine person to determine which it should be when he had it before him: whether a feast or a meat-offering, and accordingly he would be able to judge concerning him: if he ate of it as common meat, he would suppose him to be a man, a prophet; if otherwise, as it proved, he should know him to be an angel.

(7.) The angel gives him a sign in and by that which he had kindly prepared for his entertainment. For what we offer to God for his glory, and in token of our gratitude to him, will be made by the grace of God to turn to our own comfort and satisfaction. The angel ordered him to take the flesh and bread out of the basket, and lay it upon a hard and cold rock, and to pour out the broth upon it, which, if he brought it hot, would soon be cold there; and Gideon did so (v. 20), believing that the angel appointed it, not in contempt of his courtesy, but with an intention to give him a sign, which he did, abundantly to his satisfaction. For, [1.] He turned the *meat into an offering made by fire*, of a sweet savour unto himself, showing hereby that he was not a man who needed meat, but the Son of God who was to be served and honoured by sacrifice, and who in the fulness of time was to make himself a sacrifice. [2.] He brought fire out of the rock, to consume this sacrifice, summoning it, not by striking the rock, as we strike fire out of a flint, but by a gentle touch given to the offering with the end of his staff, v. 21. Hereby he gave him a sign that he had found grace in his sight, for God testified his acceptance of sacrifices by kindling them, if public, with fire from



heaven, as those of Moses and Elias, if private, as this, with fire out of the earth, which was equivalent: both were the effect of divine power; and this acceptance of his sacrifice evidenced the acceptance of his person, confirmed his commission, and perhaps was intended to signify his success in the execution of it, that he and his army should be a surprising terror and consumption to the Midianites, like this fire out of the rock. [3.] He *departed out of his sight* immediately, did not walk off as a man, but vanished and disappeared as a spirit. Here was as much of a sign as he could wish.

(8.) Gideon, though no doubt he was confirmed in his faith by the indications given of the divinity of the person who had spoken to him, yet for the present was put into a great fright by it, till God graciously pacified him and removed his fears. [1.] Gideon speaks peril to himself (v. 22): *When he perceived that he was on angel* (which was not till he had departed, as the two disciples knew not it was Jesus they had been talking with till he was going, Luke xxiv. 31), then he cried out, *Alas! O Lord God!* be merciful to me, I am undone, for *I have seen an angel*, as Jacob, who wondered that his life was preserved when he had seen God, Gen. xxxii. 30. Ever since man has by sin exposed himself to God's wrath and curse an express from heaven has been a terror to him, as he scarcely dares to expect good tidings thence; at least, in this world of sense, it is a very awful thing to have any sensible conversation with that world of spirits to which we are so much strangers. Gideon's courage failed him now. [2.] God speaks peace to him, v. 23. It might have been fatal to him, but he assures him it should not. The Lord had *departed out of his sight*, v. 21. But though he must no longer walk by sight he might still live by faith, that faith which comes by hearing; for the Lord said to him, with an audible voice (as bishop Patrick thinks) these encouraging words, "*Peace be unto thee*, all is well, and be thou satisfied that it is so. Fear not; he that came to employ thee did not intend to slay thee; *thou shalt not die.*" See how ready God is to revive the hearts of those that tremble at his word and presence, and to give those that stand in awe of his majesty assurances of his mercy.

3. The memorial of this vision which Gideon set up was a monument in form of an altar, the rather because it was by a kind of sacrifice upon a rock, without the solemnity of an altar, that the angel manifested his acceptance of him; then an altar was unnecessary (the angel's staff was sufficient to sanctify the gift without an altar), but now it was of use to preserve the remembrance of the vision, which was done by the name Gideon gave to this memorial, *Jehovah-shalom* (v. 24) — *The Lord peace*. This is, (1.) The title of the Lord that spoke to him. Compare Gen.

xvi. 13. The same that is the *Lord our righteousness is our peace* (Eph. ii. 14), our reconciler and so our Saviour. Or, (2.) The substance of what he said to him: "*The Lord spoke peace*, and created that fruit of the lips, bade me be easy when I was in that agitation." Or, (3.) A prayer grounded upon what he had said, so the margin understands it: *The Lord send peace*, that is, rest from the present trouble, for still the public welfare lay nearest his heart.

25 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, *Take thy father's young bullock*, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: 26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. 27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. 28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. 29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. 30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. 31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Here, I. Orders are given to Gideon to

begin his government with the reformation of his father's house, *v.* 25, 26. A correspondence being settled between God and Gideon, by the appearance of the angel to him, it was kept up in another way; the same night after he had seen God, when he was full of thoughts concerning what had passed, which probably he had not yet communicated to any, *the Lord said unto him in a dream, Do so and so.* Note, God's visits, if gratefully received, shall be graciously repeated. Bid God welcome, and he will come again. Gideon is appointed, 1. To throw down Baal's altar, which it seems his father had, either for his own house or perhaps for the whole town. See the power of God's grace, that he could raise up a reformer, and the condescensions of his grace, that he would raise up a deliverer, out of the family of one that was a ring-leader in idolatry. But Gideon must not now think it enough not to worship at that altar, which we charitably hope he had not done, but he must throw it down; not consecrate the same altar to God (it is bishop Hall's observation), but utterly demolish it. God first commands down the monuments of superstition, and then enjoins his own service. He must likewise *cut down the grove that was by it*, the plantation of young trees, designed to beautify the place. The learned bishop Patrick, by the grove, understands the image in the grove, probably the image of Ashtaroth (for the word for a grove is *Ashereh*), which stood upon or close by the altar. 2. To erect an altar to God, to *Jehovah his God*, which probably was to be notified by an inscription upon the altar to that purport—to Jehovah, Gideon's God, or Israel's. It would have been an improper thing for him to build an altar, even to the God of Israel, especially for burnt-offering and sacrifice, and would have been construed into a contempt of the altar at Shiloh, if God, who has not tied up himself to his own laws, had not bidden him to do it. But now it was his duty and honour to be thus employed. God directs him to the place where he should build it, on the *top of the rock*, perhaps in the same place in which the angel had appeared to him, near to the altar he had already built: and he must not do it in a hurry, but with the decency that became a religious action (*in an orderly manner*, as it is in the margin), according to the ancient law for altars raised on particular occasions, that they must be of earth not of hewn stone. The word here used for the rock on which the altar was to be built signifies a fortress, or strong-hold, erected, some think, to secure them from the Midianites; if so, it was no security while the altar of Baal was so near it, but it was effectually fortified when an altar to the Lord was built on the top of it, for that is the best defence upon our glory. On this altar, 1.) he was to offer sacrifice. Two bullocks

he must offer: his father's *young bullock*, and the *second bullock of seven years old*, so it should rather be read, not *even* the second as we read it. The former, we may suppose, he was to offer for himself, the latter for the *sins of the people* whom he was to deliver. It was requisite he should thus make peace with God, before he made war on Midian. Till sin be pardoned through the great sacrifice, no good is to be expected. These bullocks, it is supposed, were intended for sacrifices on the altar of Baal, but were now converted to a better use. Thus, when the *strong man armed* is overcome and dispossessed, the stronger than he divides the spoil, seizes that for himself *which was prepared for Baal*. Let him come *whose right it is*, and *give it to him*. (2.) Baal's grove, or image, or whatever it was that was the sanctity or beauty of his altar, must not only be burnt, but must be used as fuel for God's altar, to signify not only that whatever sets up itself in opposition to God shall be destroyed, but that the justice of God will be glorified in its destruction. God ordered Gideon to do this, [1.] To try his zeal for religion, which it was necessary he should give proofs of before he took the field, to give proof of his valour there. [2.] That some steps might hereby be taken towards Israel's reformation, which must prepare the way for their deliverance. Sin, the cause, must be taken away, else how should the trouble, which was but the effect, come to an end? And it might be hoped that this example of Gideon's, who was now shortly to appear so great a man, would be followed by the rest of the cities and tribes, and the destruction of this one altar of Baal would be the destruction of many.

II. Gideon was *obedient to the heavenly vision*, *v.* 27. He that was to command the Israel of God must be subject to the God of Israel, without disputing, and, as a type of Christ, must first *save his people from their sins*, and then save them from their enemies. 1. He had servants of his own, whom he could confide in, who, we may suppose, like him, had kept their integrity, and had *not bowed the knee to Baal*, and therefore were forward to assist him in destroying the altar of Baal. 2. He did not scruple taking his father's bullock and offering it to God without his father's consent, because God, who expressly commanded him to do so, had a better title to it than his father had, and it was the greatest real kindness he could do to his father to prevent his sin. 3. He expected to incur the displeasure of his father's household by it, and the ill-will of his neighbours, yet he did it, remembering how much it was Levi's praise that, in the cause of God, *he said to his father and mother, I have not seen him*, Deut. xxxiii. 9. And, while he was sure of the favour of God, he feared not the anger of men; he that bade him do it would bear him out. Yet, 4.

Though he feared not their resentment when it was done, to prevent their resistance in the doing of it he prudently chose to do it by night, that he might not be disturbed in these sacred actions. And some think it was the same night in which God spoke to him to do it, and that, as soon as ever he had received the orders, he immediately applied himself to the execution of them, and finished before morning.

III. He was brought into peril of his life for doing it, *v.* 28—30. 1. It was soon discovered what was done. Gideon, when he had gone through with the business, did not desire the concealment of it, nor could it be hid, for the men of the city *rose early in the morning*, as it should seem, to say their matins at Baal's altar, and so to begin the day with their god, such a one as he was, a shame to those who say the true God is their God, and yet, in the morning, direct no prayer to him, nor look up. 2. It was soon discovered who had done it. Strict enquiry was made. Gideon was known to be disaffected to the worship of Baal, which brought him into suspicion, and positive proof immediately came against him: "Gideon, no doubt, *has done this thing.*" 3. Gideon being found guilty of the fact, to such a pitch of impiety had these degenerate Israelites arrived that they take it for law he must die for the same, and require his own father (who, by patronising their idolatry, had given them too much cause to expect he would comply with them herein) to deliver him up: *Bring out thy son, that he may die.* Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and tremble, O earth! By the law of God the worshippers of Baal were to die, but these wicked men impiously turn the penalty upon the worshippers of the God of Israel. How prodigiously mad were they upon their idols! Was it not enough to offer the choicest of their bullocks to Baal, but must the bravest youth of their city fall as a sacrifice to that dunghill-deity, when they pretended he was provoked? How soon will idolaters become persecutors!

IV. He was rescued out of the hands of his persecutors by his own father, *r.* 31.

1. There were those that stood against Gideon, that not only appeared at the first to make a demand, but insisted on it, and would have him put to death. Notwithstanding the heavy judgments they were at this time under for their idolatry, yet they hated to be reformed, and walked contrary to God even when he was walking contrary to them.

2. Yet then *Joash stood for him*; he was one of the chief men of the city. Those that have power may do a great deal for the protection of an honest man and an honest cause, and when they so use their power they are ministers of God for good.

(1.) This Joash had patronised Baal's altar, yet now protects him that had destroyed it, [1.] Out of natural affection to his son, and

perhaps a particular esteem for him as a virtuous, valiant, valuable, young man, and never the worse for not joining with him in the worship of Baal. Many that have not courage enough to keep their integrity themselves yet have so much conscience left as makes them love and esteem those that do. If Joash had a kindness for Baal, yet he had a greater kindness for his son. Or, [2.] Out of a care for the public peace. The mob grew riotous, and, he feared, would grow more so, and therefore, as some think, he bestirred himself to repress the tumult: "Let it be left to the judges; it is not for you to pass sentence upon any man; he that offers it, *let him be put to death*:" he means not as an idolater, but as a disturber of the peace, and the mover of sedition. Under this same colour Paul was rescued at Ephesus from those that were as zealous for Diana as these were for Baal, Acts xix. 40. Or, [3.] Out of a conviction that Gideon had done well. His son, perhaps, had reasoned with him, or God, who has all hearts in his hands, had secretly and effectually influenced him to appear thus against the advocates for Baal, though he had complied with them formerly in the worship of Baal. Note, It is good to appear for God when we are called to it, though there be few or none to second us, because God can incline the hearts of those to stand by us from whom we little expect assistance. Let us do our duty, and then trust God with our safety.

(2.) Two things Joash urges:—[1.] That it was absurd for them to plead for Baal. "Will you that are Israelites, the worshippers of the one only living and true God, plead for Baal, a false god? Will you be so sottish, so senseless? Those whose fathers' god Baal was, and who never knew any other, are more excusable in pleading for him than you are, that are in covenant with Jehovah, and have been trained up in the knowledge of him. You that have smarted so much for worshipping Baal, and have brought all this mischief and calamity upon yourselves by it, will you yet plead for Baal?" Note, It is bad to commit sin, but it is great wickedness indeed to plead for it, especially to plead for Baal, that idol, whatever it is, which possesses that room in the heart which God should have. [2.] That it was needless for them to plead for Baal. If he were not a god, as was pretended, they could have nothing to say for him; if he were, he was able to plead for himself, as the God of Israel had often done by fire from heaven, or some other judgment against those who put contempt upon him. Here is a fair challenge to Baal to *do either good or evil*, and the result convinced his worshippers of their folly in praying to one to help them that could not avenge himself; after this Gideon remarkably prospered, and thereby it appeared how unable Baal was to maintain his own cause.

(3.) Gideon's father hereupon gave him

a new name (v. 32); he called him *Jerubbaal*: "Let Baal plead; let him plead against him if he can; if he have any thing to say for himself against his destroyer, let him say it." This name was a standing defiance to Baal: "Now that Gideon is taking up arms against the Midianites that worship Baal, let him defend his worshippers if he can." It likewise gave honour to Gideon (a sworn enemy to that great usurper, and that had carried the day against him), and encouragement to his soldiers, that they fought under one that fought for God against this great competitor with him for the throne. It is the probable conjecture of the learned that that Jerombalus whom Sanchoniathon (one of the most ancient of all the heathen writers) speaks of as a *priest of the god Jao* (a corruption of the name *Jehovah*), and one to whom he was indebted for a great deal of knowledge, was this Jerubbaal. He is called *Jerubbesheth* (2 Sam. xi. 12), *Baal*, a *lord*, being fitly turned into *Besheth*, *shame*.

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him. 35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. 36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, 37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth *beside*, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. 38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. 40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Here we have, I. The descent which the enemies of Israel made upon them, v. 33. A vast number of Midianites, Amalekites, and Arabians, got together, and came over Jordan, none either caring or daring to guard that important and advantageous pass against them, and they made their headquarters in the valley of Jezreel, in the heart of Manasseh's tribe, not far from Gideon's city. Some think that the notice they had of Gideon's destroying Baal's altar brought them over, and that they came to plead for Baal and to make that a pretence for quarrelling with Israel; but it is more likely that it was now harvest-time, when they had been wont each year to make such a visit as this (v. 3), and that they were expected when Gideon was threshing, v. 11. God raised up Gideon to be ready against this terrible blow came. Their success so many years in these incursions, the little opposition they had met with and the great booty they had carried off, made them now both very eager and very confident. But it proved that the *measure of their iniquity was full* and the year of recompence had come; they must now *make an end to spoil and must be spoiled*, and they are *gathered as sheaves to the floor* (Mic. iv. 12, 13), for Gideon to thresh.

II. The preparation which Gideon makes to attack them in their camp, v. 34, 35. 1. God by his Spirit put life into Gideon: *The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon* (so the word is), clothed him as a robe, to put honour upon him, clothed him as a coat of mail, to put defence upon him. Those are well clad that are thus clothed. *A spirit of fortitude from before the Lord clothed Gideon*; so the Chaldee. He was of himself a mighty man of valour; yet personal strength and courage, though vigorously exerted, would not suffice for this great action; he must have the *armour of God* upon him, and this is what he must depend upon: *The Spirit of the Lord clothed him* in an extraordinary manner. Whom God calls to his work he will qualify and animate for it. 2. Gideon with his trumpet put life into his neighbours, God working with him; he *blew a trumpet*, to call in volunteers, and more came in than perhaps he expected. (1.) The men of Abiezer, though lately enraged against him for throwing down the altar of Baal, and though they had condemned him to death as a criminal, were now convinced of their error, bravely came in to his assistance, and submitted to him as their general: *Abiezer was gathered after him*, v. 34. So suddenly can God turn the hearts even of idolaters and persecutors. (2.) Distant tribes, even Asher and Naphtali, which lay most remote, though strangers to him, obeyed his summons, and sent him in the best of their forces, v. 35. Though they lay furthest from the danger, yet, considering that if their neighbours were over-run by the Midianites their own turn would be next.

they were forward to join against a common enemy.

III. The signs which God gratified him with, for the confirming both of his own faith and that of his followers; and perhaps it was more for their sakes than for his own that he desired them. Or, perhaps, he desired by these to be satisfied whether this was the time of his conquering the Midianites, or whether he was to wait for some other opportunity. Observe, 1. His request for a sign (v. 36, 37): "Let me by this know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand, let a fleece of wool, spread in the open air, be wet with the dew, and let the ground about it be dry." The purport of this is, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.* He found his own faith weak and wavering, and therefore begged of God by this sign to perfect what was lacking in it. We may suppose that God, who intended to give him these signs, for the glorifying of his own power and goodness, put it into his heart to ask them. Yet, when he repeated his request for a second sign, the reverse of the former, he did it with a very humble apology, deprecating God's displeasure, because it looked so like a peevish humoursome distrust of God and dissatisfaction with the many assurances he had already given him (v. 39): *Let not thy anger be hot against me.* Though he took the boldness to ask another sign, yet he did it with such fear and trembling as showed that the familiarity God had graciously admitted him to did not breed any contempt of God's glory, nor presumption on God's goodness. Abraham had given him an example of this, when God gave him leave to be very free with him (Gen. xviii. 30, 32), *O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.* God's favour must be sought with great reverence, a due sense of our distance, and a religious fear of his wrath. 2. God's gracious grant of his request. See how tender God is of true believers though they be weak, and how ready to condescend to their infirmities, that the bruised reed may not be broken nor the smoking flax quenched. Gideon would have the fleece wet and the ground dry; but then, lest any should object, "It is natural for wool, if ever so little moisture fall, to drink it in and retain it, and therefore there was nothing extraordinary in this," though the quantity wrung out was sufficient to obviate such an objection, yet he desires that next night the ground might be wet and the fleece dry, and it is done, so willing is God to give to the heirs of promise strong consolation (Heb. vi. 17, 18), even by two immutable things. He suffers himself, not only to be prevailed with by their importunities, but even to be prescribed to by their doubts and dissatisfactions. These signs were, (1.) Truly miraculous, and therefore abundantly serving to confirm his commission. It is said of the dew that it is from the Lord, and tarrieth not for man nor waiteth for the sons

of men (Micah. v. 7); and yet God here in this matter *hearkened to the voice of a man*; as to Joshua, in directing the course of the sun, so to Gideon in directing that of the dew, by which it appears that it falls not by chance, but by providence. The latter sign inverted the former, and, to please Gideon, it was wrought backward and forward, whence Dr. Fuller observes that *heaven's real miracles will endure turning, being inside and outside both alike.* (2.) Very significant. He and his men were going to engage the Midianites; could God distinguish between a small fleece of Israel and the vast floor of Midian? Yes, by this he is made to know that he can. Is Gideon desirous that the dew of divine grace might descend upon himself in particular? He sees the fleece wet with dew to assure him of it. Does he desire that God will be as the dew to all Israel? Behold, all the ground is wet. Some make this fleece an emblem of the Jewish nation, which, when time was, was wet with the dew of God's word and ordinances, while the rest of the world was dry; but since the rejection of Christ and his gospel they are dry *as the heath in the wilderness*, while the nations about are *as a watered garden.*

## CHAP. VII.

This chapter presents us with Gideon in the field, commanding the army of Israel, and routing the army of the Midianites, for which great exploit we found in the former chapter how he was prepared by his converse with God and his conquest of Baal. We are here told, I. What direction God gave to Gideon for the modelling of his army, by which it was reduced to 300 men, ver. 1, 8. II. What encouragement God gave to Gideon to attack the enemy, by sending him secretly into their camp to hear a Midianite tell his dream, ver. 9-16. III. How he formed his attack upon the enemy's camp with his 300 men, not to fight them, but to frighten them, ver. 16-20. IV. The success of this attack; it put them to flight, and gave them a total rout, the disbanded forces, and their other neighbours, then coming in to his assistance, ver. 21-25. It is a story that shines very brightly in the book of the wars of the Lord.

**T**HEN Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the

water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, *that* of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6 And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7 And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place. 8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest of* Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

Here, 1. Gideon applies himself with all possible care and industry to do the part of a good general, in leading on the hosts of Israel against the Midianites (v. 1): *He rose up early*, as one whose heart was upon his business, and who was afraid of losing time. Now that he is sure God is with him he is impatient of delay. He pitched near a famous well, that his army might not be distressed for want of water, and gained the higher ground, which possibly might be some advantage to him, for the Midianites were beneath him in the valley. Note, Faith in God's promises must not slacken, but rather quicken, our endeavours. When we are sure God goes before us, then we must bestir ourselves, 2 Sam. v. 24.

11. God provides that the praise of the intended victory may be reserved wholly to himself, by appointing 300 men only to be employed in this service.

1. The army consisted of 32,000 men, a small army in comparison with what Israel might have raised upon so great an occasion, and a very small one in comparison with what the Midianites had now brought into the field; Gideon was ready to think them too few, but God comes to him, and tells him they are *too many*, v. 2. Not but that those did well who offered themselves willingly to

this expedition, but God saw fit not to make use of all that came. We often find God bringing great things to pass by a few hands, but this was the only time that he purposely made them fewer. Had Deborah lately blamed those who *came not to the help of the Lord*, and yet in the next great action must those be turned off that do come? Yes! (1.) God would hereby show that when he employed suitable instruments in his service he did not need them, but could do his work without them, so that he was not indebted to them for their service, but they to him for employing them. (2.) He would hereby put those to shame for their cowardice who had tamely submitted to the Midianites, and durst not make head against them, because of the disproportion of their numbers. They now saw that, if they had but made sure of the favour of God, one of them might have chased a thousand. (3.) He would hereby silence and exclude boasting. This is the reason here given by him who knows the pride that is in men's hearts: *Lest Israel raunt themselves against me*. Justly were those denied the honour of the service who would not give God the honour of the success. *My own hand hath saved me* is a word that must never come out of the mouth of such as shall be saved. *He that glories must glory in the Lord*, and all flesh must be silent before him.

2. Two ways God took to lessen their numbers:—(1.) He ordered all that would own themselves timorous and faint-hearted to be dismissed, v. 3. They were now encamped on a mountain close to the enemy, called *Mount Gilead*, from Gilead, the common ancestor of these families of Manasseh, which were seated on this side Jordan (Num. xxvi. 30), and thence they might see perhaps the vast numbers of the enemy; those therefore who were disheartened at the sight were left to their liberty, to go back if they pleased. There was a law for making such a proclamation as this, Deut. xx. 8. But Gideon perhaps thought that concerned only those wars which were undertaken for the enlarging of their coast, not, as this, for their necessary defence against an invader; therefore Gideon would not have proclaimed this if God, who knew how his forces would hereby be diminished, had not commanded him. Cowards would be as likely as any, after the victory, to take the honour of it from God, and therefore God would not do them the honour to employ them in it. One would have thought there would be scarcely one Israelite to be found that against such an enemy as the Midianites, and under such a leader as Gideon, would own himself fearful; yet above two parts of three took advantage of this proclamation, and fled off, when they saw the strength of the enemy and their own weakness, not considering the assurances of the divine presence which their general had received of the Lord, and, it is likely, delivered unto them. Some think the op-

pression they had been under so long had broken their spirits, others, more probably, that consciousness of their own guilt had deprived them of their courage. Sin stared them in the face, and therefore they durst not look death in the face. Note, Fearful faint-hearted people are not fit to be employed for God; and, among those that are enlisted under the banner of Christ, there are more such than we think there are. (2.) He directed the cashiering of all that remained except 300 men, and he did it by a sign: *The people are yet too many* for me to make use off, v. 4. See how much God's thoughts and ways are above ours. Gideon himself, it is likely, thought they were too few, though they were as many as Barak encountered Sisera with (*ch. iv. 14*); and, had he not forced his way through the discouragement by dint of faith, he himself would have started back from so hazardous an enterprise, and have made the best of his own way back. But God saith, they are *too many*, and, when diminished to a third part, they are yet *too many*, which may help us to understand those providences which sometimes seem to weaken the church and its interests: its friends are too many, too mighty, too wise, for God to work deliverance by; God is taking a course to lessen them, that he may be *exalted in his own strength*. Gideon is ordered to bring his soldiers to the watering, probably to the well of Harod (v. 1) and the stream that ran from it; he, or some appointed by him, must observe how they drank. We must suppose they were all thirsty, and were inclined to drink; it is likely he told them they must prepare to enter upon action immediately, and therefore must refresh themselves accordingly, not expecting, after this, to drink any thing else but the blood of their enemies. Now some, and no doubt the most, would kneel down on their knees to drink, and put their mouths to the water as horses do, and so they might get their full draught. Others, it may be, would not make such a formal business of it, but as a dog laps with his tongue, a lap and away, so they would hastily take up a little water in their hands, and cool their mouths with that, and be gone. Three hundred and no more there were of this latter sort, that drank in haste, and by those God tells Gideon he would rout the Midianites, v. 7. By the former distinction none were retained but hearty men, that were resolved to do their utmost for retrieving the liberties of Israel; but by this further distinction it was provided that none should be made use of but, [1.] Men that were hardy, that could endure long fatigue, without complaining of thirst or weariness, that had not in them any dregs either of sloth or luxury. [2.] Men that were hasty, that thought it long till they were engaged with the enemy, preferring the service of God and their country before their necessary refresh-

ment; such as these God chooses to employ, that are not only well affected, but zealously affected in a good thing. And also because these were the smaller number, and therefore the least likely to effect what they were designed for, God would by them save Israel. It was a great trial to the faith and courage of Gideon, when God bade him let all the rest of the people but these 300 *go every man to his place*, that is, go where they pleased out of his call, and from under his command; yet we may suppose those that were hearty in the cause, though now set aside, did not go so far out of hearing but that they were ready to follow the blow, when the 300 had broken the ice, though this does not appear. Thus strangely was Gideon's army purged, and modelled, and reduced, instead of being recruited, as one would think in so great an action it both needed and deserved to be. Now,

3. Let us see how this little despicable regiment, on which the stress of the action must lie, was accoutred and fitted out. Had these 300 been double-manned with servants and attendants, and double-armed with swords and spears, we should have thought them the more likely to bring something to pass. But, instead of making them more serviceable by their equipment, they are made less so. For, (1.) Every soldier turns sutler: *They took victuals in their hands* (v. 8), left their bag and baggage behind, and every man burdened himself with his own provision, which was a trial of their faith, whether they could trust God when they had no more provisions with them than they could carry, and a trial of their diligence, whether they would carry as much as they had occasion for. This was indeed living from hand to mouth. (2.) Every soldier turns trumpeter. The regiments that were cashiered left their trumpets behind them for the use of these 300 men, who were furnished with these instead of weapons of war, as if they had been going rather to a game than to a battle.

9 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: 11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. 12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude;

and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. 13 And when Gideon was come, behold, *there was* a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15 And it was *so*, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Gideon's army being diminished as we have found it was, he must either fight by faith or not at all; God therefore here provides recruits for his faith, instead of recruits for his forces.

I. He furnishes him with a good foundation to build his faith upon. Nothing but a word from God will be a footing for faith. He has this as full and express as he can desire, v. 9. 1. A word of command to warrant the action, which otherwise seemed rash and indiscreet, and unbecoming a wise general. *Arise, get thee down* with this handful of men *unto the host*. 2. A word of promise to assure him of the success, which otherwise seemed very improbable: *I have delivered it into thy hand*; it is all thy own. This *word of the Lord* came to him the same night, when he was (we may suppose) greatly agitated and full of care how he should come off; *in the multitude of his thoughts within him these comforts did delight his soul*. Divine consolations are given in to believers not only strongly but seasonably.

II. He furnishes him with a good prop to support his faith with. 1. He orders him to be his own spy, and now in the dead of the night to go down privately into the host of Midian, and see what intelligence he could gain: "*If thou fear to go down to fight, go first only with thy own servant* (v. 10) and *hear what they say*" (v. 11); and it is intimated to him that he should hear that which would greatly strengthen his faith. God knows the infirmities of his people, and what great encouragement they may sometimes take from a small matter; and therefore, knowing beforehand what would occur to Gideon, in that very part of the camp to which he would go down, he orders him to

go down and hearken to what they said, that he might the more firmly believe what God said. He must take with him *Phurah his servant*, one that he could confide in, probably one of the ten that had helped him to break down the altar of Baal. He must take him and no one else with him, must take him with him to be a witness of what he should hear the Midianites say, that out of the mouth of these two witnesses, when the matter came to be reported to Israel, the word might be established. He must take his servant with him, because two are better than one and a little help is better than none. 2. Being so, he orders him the sight of something that was discouraging. It was enough to frighten him to discern, perhaps by moon-light, the vast numbers of the enemy (v. 12), the men like grasshoppers for multitude, and they proved no better than grasshoppers for strength and courage; the camels one could not count, any more than the sand. But, 3. He causes him to hear that which was to him a very good omen; and when he had heard it he went back again immediately, supposing he now had what he was sent thither for. He overheard two soldiers of the enemy, that were comrades, talking; probably they were in bed together, waking in the night. (1.) One of them tells his dream, and as our dreams generally are, and therefore not worth telling again, it is a very foolish one. He dreamed that he saw a barley-cake come rolling down the hill into the camp of the Midianites, and "methought," says he (for so we speak in telling our dreams), "this rolling cake struck one of our tents" (perhaps one of the chief of their tents) "and with such violence that" (would you think it?) "it overturned the tent, forced down the stakes, and broke the cords at one blow, so that the tent lay along and buried its inhabitants," v. 13. *In multitudes of dreams there are divers vanities*, says Solomon, Eccl. v. 7. One would wonder what odd incoherent things are often put together by a ludicrous fancy in our dreams. (2.) The other, it may be between sleeping and waking, undertakes to interpret this dream, and the interpretation is very far-fetched: *This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon*, v. 14. Our expositors now can tell us how apt the resemblance was, that Gideon, who had threshed corn for his family, and made cakes for his friend (ch. vi. 11—19), was fitly represented by a cake,—that he and his army were as inconsiderable as a cake made of a little flour, as contemptible as a barley-cake, hastily got together as a cake suddenly baked upon the coals, and as unlikely to conquer this great army as a cake to overthrow a tent. But, after all, do *not interpretations belong to God?* He put it into the head of the one to dream and into the mouth of the other to give the sense of it; if Gideon had heard the dream only, and he and his servant had been left to interpret it them-



selves, it had so little significancy in it that it would have done him little service; but, having the interpretation from the mouth of an enemy, it not only appeared to come from God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand, but it was likewise an evidence that the enemy was quite dispirited, and that the name of Gideon had become so formidable to them that it disturbed their sleep. The victory would easily be won which was already so tamely yielded: *Into his hand hath God delivered Midian.* Those were not likely to fight who saw God fighting against them.

Lastly, Gideon, observing the finger of God pointing him to this very place, at this very time, to hear this dream and the interpretation of it, was exceedingly encouraged by it against the melancholy apprehensions he had upon the reducing of his army. He was very well pleased to hear himself compared to a barley-cake, when it proved to effect such great things. Being hereby animated, we are told (v. 15), 1. How he gave God the glory of it; he worshipped immediately, bowed his head, or, it may be, lifted up his eyes and hands, and in a short ejaculation thanked God for the victory he was now sure of, and for this encouragement to expect it. Wherever we are, we may speak to God, and worship him, and find a way open heavenward. God must have the praise of that which is encouraging to our faith, and his providence must be acknowledged in those events which, though minute and seemingly accidental, prove serviceable to us. 2. How he gave his friends a share in the encouragements he had received: *Arise, prepare to march presently; the Lord has delivered Midian into your hand.*

16 And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. 17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be *that*, as I do, so shall ye do. 18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that *are* with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.* 19 So Gideon, and the hundred men that *were* with him, came unto the outside of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that *were* in their hands. 20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps

in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow *withal*: and they cried, *The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.* 21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

Here is, I. The alarm which Gideon gave to the hosts of Midian in the dead time of the night; for it was intended that those who had so long been a terror to Israel, and had so often frightened them, should themselves be routed and ruined purely by terror.

1. The attack here made was, in many circumstances, like that which Abraham made upon the army that had taken Lot captive. The number of men was much the same: Abraham had 318, Gideon 300; they both divided their forces, both made their attack by night, and were both victorious under great disadvantages (Gen. xiv. 14, 15); and Gideon is not only a son of Abraham (so were the Midianites by Keturah) but an heir of his faith. Gideon, (1.) Divided his army, small as it was, into three battalions (v. 16), one of which he himself commanded (v. 19), because great armies (and such a one he would make a show of) were usually divided into the right wing, and left wing, and the body of the army. (2.) He ordered them all to do as he did, v. 17. He told them now, it is very likely, what they must do, else the thing was so strange that they would scarcely have done it of a sudden, but he would, by doing it first, give notice to them when to do it, as officers exercise their soldiers with the word of command or by beat of drum: *Look on me, and do likewise.* Such is the word of command which our Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation, gives his soldiers; for he has *left us an example*, with a charge to follow it: *As I do, so shall you do.* (3.) He made his descent in the night, when they were secure and least expected it, which would put them into great consternation, and when the smallness of his army would not be discovered. In the night all frights are most frightful, especially in the dead of the night, as this was, a little after midnight, when the middle watch began, and the alarm would wake them out of their sleep. We read of *terror by night* as very terrible (Ps. xci. 5), and *fear in the night*, Cant. iii. 8. (4.) That which Gideon aimed at was to frighten this huge host, to give them not only a fatal rout, but a very shameful one. He accoutred his army with every man a trumpet in his right hand, and an earthen pitcher, with a

torch in it, in his left, and he himself thought it no disparagement to him to march before them thus armed. He would make but a jest of conquering this army, and goes out against them rather as against a company of children than against a host of soldiers. *The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn*, Isa. xxxvii. 22. The fewness of his men favoured his design; for, being so few, they marched to the camp with the greater secrecy and expedition, so that they were not discovered till they were close by the camp; and he contrived to give the alarm when they had just mounted the guards (v. 19), that the sentinels, being then wakeful, might the sooner disperse the alarm through the camp, which was the best service they could do him. Three ways Gideon contrived to strike a terror upon this army, and so put them into confusion. [1.] With a great noise. Every man must blow his trumpet in the most terrible manner he could and clatter an earthen pitcher to pieces at the same time; probably each dashed his pitcher to his next man's, and so they were broken both together, which would not only make a great crash, but was a figure of what would be the effects of the fright, even the Midianites' killing one another. [2.] With a great blaze. The lighted torches were hid in the pitchers, like *a candle under a bushel*, until they came to the camp, and then, being taken out all together of a sudden, would make a glaring show, and run through the camp like a flash of lightning. Perhaps with these they set some of the tents on the outside of the camp on fire, which would very much increase the confusion. [3.] With a great shout. Every man must cry, *For the Lord, and for Gideon*, so some think it should be read in v. 18, for there the sword is not in the original, but it is in v. 20, *The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon*. It should seem, he borrowed the word from the Midianite's dream (v. 14): it is *the sword of Gideon*. Finding his name was a terror to them, he thus improves it against them, but prefixes the name of Jehovah, as the figure without which his own was but an insignificant cypher. This would put life into his own men, who might well take courage when they had such a God as Jehovah, and such a man as Gideon, both to *fight for*, and to *fight for them*; well might those follow who had such leaders. It would likewise put their enemies into a fright, who had of old heard of Jehovah's great name, and of late of Gideon's. The sword of the Lord is all in all to the success of the sword of Gideon, yet the sword of Gideon must be employed. Men the instruments, and God the principal agent, must both be considered in their places, but men, the greatest and best, always in suberviency and subordination to God. This army was to be defeated purely by terrors, and these are especially the *sword of the*

*Lord*. These soldiers, if they had swords by their sides, that was all, they had none in their hands, but they gained the victory by shouting "The sword." So the church's enemies are routed by *a sword out of the mouth*, Rev. xix. 21.

2. This method here taken of defeating the Midianites may be alluded to, (1.) As typifying the destruction of the devil's kingdom in the world by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the sounding of that trumpet, and the holding forth of that light out of earthen vessels, for such the ministers of the gospel are, in whom the treasure of that light is deposited, 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7. Thus God chose the *foolish things of the world to confound the wise*, a barley-cake to overthrow the tents of Midian, that the *excellency of the power might be of God only*; the gospel is a sword, not in the hand, but in the mouth, the sword of the *Lord and of Gideon*, of God and Jesus Christ, him that sits on the throne and the Lamb. (2.) As representing the terrors of the great day. So the excellent bishop Hall applies it; if these pitchers, trumpets, and firebrands, did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who shall be able to stand before the last terror, when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, the elements shall be on a flame, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the Lord himself shall descend with a shout!

II. The wonderful success of this alarm. The Midianites were shouted out of their lives, as the walls of Jericho were shouted down, that Gideon might see what he lately despaired of ever seeing, the *wonders that their fathers told them of*. Gideon's soldiers observed their orders, and *stood every man in his place round about the camp* (v. 21), sounding his trumpet to excite them to fight one another, and holding out his torch to light them to their ruin. They did not rush into the host of Midian, as greedy either of blood or spoil, but patiently stood still to *see the salvation of the Lord*, a salvation purely of his own working. Observe how the design took effect. 1. They feared the Israelites. *All the host* immediately took the alarm; it flew like lightning through all their lines, and *they ran, and cried, and fled*, v. 21. There was something natural in this fright. We may suppose they had not had intelligence of the great diminution of Gideon's army, but rather concluded that since their last advices it had been growing greater and greater; and therefore they had reason to suspect, knowing how odious and grievous they had made themselves and what bold steps had been taken towards the throwing off of their yoke, that it was a very great army which was to be ushered in with all those trumpeters and torch-bearers. But there was more of a supernatural power impressing this terror upon them. God himself gave it the setting on, to show how that promise should have been fulfilled if they had not

forfeited it, *One of you shall chase a thousand.* See the power of imagination, and how much it may become a terror at some times, as at other times it is a pleasure. 2. They fell foul upon one another: *The Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, v. 22.* In this confusion, observing the trumpeters and toreh-bearers to stand still without their camp, they concluded the body of the army had already entered and was in the midst of them, and therefore every one ran at the next he met, though a friend, supposing him an enemy, and one such mistake as this would occasion many, for then he that slew him would certainly be taken for an enemy, and would be dispatched immediately. It is our interest to preserve such a command of our own spirits as never to *be afraid with any amazement*, for we cannot conceive what mischiefs we thereby plunge ourselves into. See also how God often makes the enemies of his church instruments to destroy one another; it is a pity the church's friends should ever be thus infatuated. 3. They fled for their lives. Perhaps when day-light came they were sensible of their mistake in fighting with one another, and concluded that by this fatal error they had so weakened themselves that now it was impossible to make any head against Israel, and therefore made the best of their way towards their own country, though, for aught that appears, the 300 men kept their ground. *The wicked flee when none pursueth, Prov. xxviii. 1. Terrors make him afraid on every side, and drive him to his feet, Job xviii. 11.*

23 And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites. 24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. 25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

We have here the prosecution of this glorious victory. 1. Gideon's soldiers that had been dismissed, and perhaps had begun to disperse themselves, upon notice of the enemies' flight got together again, and vigorously pursued those whom they had not courage to face. The men of Israel out of

Naphtali and Asher who did this (v. 23) were not such as now came from those distant countries, but the same that had enlisted themselves (*ch. vi. 35*), but had been cashiered. Those who were fearful and afraid to fight (v. 3) now took heart, when the worst was over, and were ready enough to divide the spoil, though backward to make the onset. Those also that might not fight though they had a mind to it, and were disbanded by order from God, did not as those, 2 Chron. xxv. 10, 13, *return in great anger*, but waited for an opportunity of doing service in pursuing the victory, though they were denied the honour of helping to force the lines. 2. The Ephraimites, upon a summons from Gideon, came in unanimously, and secured the passes over Jordan, by the several fords, to cut off the enemies' retreat into their own country, that they might be entirely destroyed, to prevent the like mischief to Israel another time. Now that they had begun to fall, it was easy to say, *Down with them, Esth. vi. 13. They took the waters (v. 24)*, that is, posted themselves along the river side, so that the Midianites, who fled from those who pursued them, fell into the hands of those that waited to intercept them. Here were *fear, and the pit, and the snare, Isa. xxiv. 17*. 3. Two of the chief commanders of the host of Midian were taken and slain by the Ephraimites on this side Jordan, v. 25. Their names perhaps signified their nature, *Oreb* signifies a *raven*, and *Zeeb* a *wolf* (*corvus* and *lupus*). These in their flight had taken shelter, one *in a rock* (*Isa. ii. 21; Rev. vi. 15*), the other by a *wine-press*, as Gideon for fear of them had lately hid his corn by a wine-press, *ch. vi. 11*. But the places of their shelter were made the places of their slaughter, and the memory of it was preserved to posterity in the names of the places, to their perpetual infamy: *Here fell the princes of Midian.*

CHAP. VIII.

This chapter gives us a further account of Gideon's victory over the Midianites, with the residue of the story of his life and government. I. Gideon prudently pacifies the offended Ephraimites, ver. 1-3. II. He bravely pursues the flying Midianites, ver. 4, 10-12. III. He justly chastises the insolence of the men of Succoth and Peniel, who basely abused him (ver. 5-9), and were reckoned with for it, ver. 13-17. IV. He honourably slays the two kings of Midian, ver. 18-21. V. After all this he modestly declines the government of Israel, ver. 22, 23. VI. He foolishly gratified the superstitious humour of his people, by setting up an ephod in his own city, which proved a great snare, ver. 24-27. VII. He kept the country quiet for forty years, ver. 28. VIII. He died in honour, and left a numerous family behind him, ver. 29-32. IX. Both he and his God were soon forgotten by ungrateful Israel, ver. 33-35.

AND the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. 2 And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? *Is not the glean- ing of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?* 3 God

nath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

No sooner were the Midianites, the common enemy, subdued, than, through the violence of some hot spirits, the children of Israel were ready to quarrel among themselves; an unhappy spark was struck, which, if Gideon had not with a great deal of wisdom and grace extinguished immediately, might have broken out into a flame of fatal consequence. The Ephraimites, when they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon as general, instead of congratulating him upon his successes and addressing him with thanks for his great services, as they ought to have done, picked a quarrel with him and grew very hot upon it.

1. Their accusation was very peevish and unreasonable: *Why didst thou not call us when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?* v. 1. Ephraim was brother to Manasseh, Gideon's tribe, and had the pre-eminence in Jacob's blessing and in Moses's, and therefore was very jealous of Manasseh, lest that tribe should at any time eclipse the honour of theirs. Hence we find Manasseh against Ephraim and Ephraim against Manasseh, Isa. ix. 21. *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are as the bars of a castle,* Prov. xviii. 19. But how unjust was their quarrel with Gideon! They were angry that he did not send for them to begin the attack upon Midian, as well as to follow the blow. Why were they not called to lead the van? The post of honour, they thought, belonged to them. But, 1. Gideon was called of God, and must act as he directed; he neither took the honour to himself nor did he himself dispose of honours, but left it to God to do all. So that the Ephraimites, in this quarrel, reflected upon the divine conduct; and what was Gideon that they *murmured against him?* 2. Why did not the Ephraimites offer themselves willingly to the service? They knew the enemy was in their country, and had heard of the forces that were raising to oppose them, to which they ought to have joined themselves, in zeal for the common cause, though they had not a formal invitation. Those seek themselves more than God that stand upon a point of honour to excuse themselves from doing real service to God and their generation. In Deborah's time there was a root of Ephraim, ch. v. 14. Why did not this appear now? The case itself called them, they needed not wait for a call from Gideon. 3. Gideon had saved their credit in not calling them. If he had sent for them, no doubt many of them would have gone back with the faint-hearted, or been dis-

missed with the lazy, slothful, and intemperate; so that by not calling them he prevented the putting of those slurs upon them. Cowards will seem valiant when the danger is over, but those consult their reputation who try not their courage when danger is near.

II. Gideon's answer was very calm and peaceable, and was intended not so much to justify himself as to please and pacify them, v. 2, 3. He answers them, 1. With a great deal of meekness and temper. He did not resent the affront, nor answer anger with anger, but mildly reasoned the case with them, and he won as true honour by this command which he had over his own passion as by his victory over the Midianites. *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.*

2. With a great deal of modesty and humility, magnifying their performances above his own: *Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim, who picked up the stragglers of the enemy, and cut off those of them that escaped, better than the vintage of Abiezer—* a greater honour to them, and better service to the country, than the first attack Gideon made upon them? The destruction of the church's enemies is compared to a vintage, Rev. xiv. 18. In this he owns their gleanings better than his gatherings. The improving of a victory is often more honourable, and of greater consequence, than the winning of it; in this they had signalized themselves, and their own courage and conduct, or, rather, God had dignified them; for though, to magnify their achievements, he is willing to diminish his own performances, yet he will not take any flowers from God's crown to adorn theirs with: "*God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, and a great slaughter has been made of the enemy by your numerous hosts, and what was I able to do with 300 men, in comparison of you and your brave exploits?*" Gideon stands here a very great example of self-denial, and this instance shows us, (1.) That humility of deportment is the best way to remove envy. It is true even right works are often envied, Eccl. iv. 4. Yet they are not so apt to be so when those who do them appear not to be proud of them. Those are malignant indeed who seek to cast down from their excellency those that humble and abase themselves. (2.) It is likewise the surest method of ending strife, *for only by pride comes contention,* Prov. xiii. 10. (3.) Humility is most amiable and admirable in the midst of great attainments and advancements. Gideon's conquests did greatly set off his condescensions. (4.) It is the proper act of humility to *esteem others better than ourselves, and in honour to prefer one another.*

Now what was the issue of this controversy? The Ephraimites had *chidden with him sharply* (v. 1), forgetting the respect due to their general and one whom God had honoured, and giving vent to their pas-

sion in a very indecent liberty of speech, a certain sign of a weak and indefensible cause. Reason runs low when the chiding flies high. But Gideon's *soft answer turned away their wrath*, Prov. xv. 1. *Their anger was abated towards him*, v. 3. It is intimated that they retained some resentment, but he prudently overlooked it and let it cool by degrees. Very great and good men must expect to have their patience tried by the unkindnesses and follies even of those they serve and must not think it strange.

4 And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that *were* with him, faint, yet pursuing *them*. 5 And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they *be* faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. 6 And the princes of Succoth said, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? 7 And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. 8 And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered *him*. 9 And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. 10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna *were* in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand *men*, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. 11 And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. 12 And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host. 13 And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun *was up*, 14 And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto

him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, *even* threescore and seventeen men. 15 And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men *that are* weary? 16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. 17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

In these verses we have,

I. Gideon, as a valiant general, pursuing the remaining Midianites, and bravely following his blow. A very great slaughter was made of the enemy at first: 120,000 *men that drew the sword*, v. 10. Such a terrible execution did they make among themselves, and so easy a prey were they to Israel. But, it seems, the two kings of Midian, being better provided than the rest for an escape, with 15,000 men got over Jordan before the passes could be secured by the Ephraimites, and made towards their own country. Gideon thinks he does not fully execute his commission to save Israel if he let them escape. He is not content to chase them out of the country, but he will *chase them out of the world*, Job xviii. 18 This resolution is here pushed on with great firmness, and crowned with great success.

1. His firmness was very exemplary. He effected his purpose under the greatest disadvantages and discouragements that could be. (1.) He took none with him but his 300 men, who now laid aside their trumpets and torches, and betook themselves to their swords and spears. God had said, *By these 300 men will I save you* (ch. vii. 7); and, confiding in that promise, Gideon kept to them only, v. 4. He expected more from 300 men, supported by a particular promise, than from so many thousands supported only by their own valour. (2.) They were *faint, and yet pursuing*, much fatigued with what they had done, and yet eager to do more against the enemies of their country. Our spiritual warfare must thus be prosecuted with what strength we have, though we have but little; it is many a time the true Christian's case, fainting and yet pursuing. (3.) Though he met with discouragement from those of his own people, was jeered for what he was doing, as going about what he could never accomplish, yet he went on with it. If those that should be our helpers in the way of our duty prove hindrances to us, let not this drive us off from it. Those know not how to value God's acceptance that know not how to despise the reproaches and contempts of men. (4.) He

made a very long march by *the way of those that dwell in tents* (v. 11), either because he hoped to find them kinder to him than the men of Succoth and Penuel, that dwell in walled towns (sometimes there is more generosity and charity found in country tents than in city palaces), or because that was a road in which he would be least expected, and therefore that way it would be the greater surprise to them. It is evident he spared no pains to complete his victory. Now he found it an advantage to have his 300 men such as could bear hunger, and thirst, and toil. It should seem, he set upon the enemy by night, as he had done before, for *the host was secure*. The security of sinners often proves their ruin, and dangers are most fatal when least feared.

2. His success was very encouraging to resolution and industry in a good cause. He routed the army (v. 11), and took the two kings prisoners, v. 12. Note, The fear of the wicked shall come upon him. Those that think to run *from the sword of the Lord and of Gideon* do but run *upon* it. If he *flee from the iron weapon*, yet *the bow of steel shall strike him through*; for *evil pursueth sinners*.

11. Here is Gideon, as a righteous judge, chastising the insolence of the disaffected Israelites, the men of Succoth and the men of Penuel, both in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan.

1. Their crime was great. Gideon, with a handful of feeble folk was pursuing the common enemy, to complete the deliverance of Israel. His way led him through the city of Succoth first and afterwards of Penuel. He expected not that the magistrates should meet him in their formalities, congratulate him upon his victory, present him with the keys of their city, and give him a treat, much less that they should send forces in to his assistance, though he was entitled to all this; but he only begs some necessary food for his soldiers that were ready to faint for want, and he does it very humbly and importunately: *Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me*, v. 5. The request would have been reasonable if they had been but poor travellers in distress; but considering that they were soldiers, *called, and chosen, and faithful* (Rev. xvii. 14), men whom God had greatly honoured and to whom Israel was highly obliged, who had done great service to their country and were now doing more,—that they were conquerors, and had power to put them under contribution,—and that they were fighting God's battles and Israel's,—nothing could be more just than that their brethren should furnish them with the best provisions their city afforded. But the princes of Succoth neither *feared God nor regarded man*. For, (1.) In contempt of God, they refused to answer the just demands of him whom God had raised up to save them, affronted him, bantered him, despised the success he had already

been honoured with, despaired of the success of his present undertaking, did what they could to discourage him in prosecuting the war, and were very willing to believe that the remaining forces of Midian, which they had now seen march through their country, would be too hard for him: *Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thy hand?* "No, nor ever will be," so they conclude, judging by the disproportion of numbers. (2.) The bowels of their compassion were shut up against their brethren; they were as destitute of love as they were of faith, would not give morsels of bread (so some read it) to those that were ready to perish. Were these princes? were these Israelites? unworthy either title, base and degenerate men! Surely they were worshippers of Baal, or in the interests of Midian. The men of Penuel gave the same answer to the same request, *defying the sword of the Lord and of Gideon*, v. 8.

2. The warning he gave them of the punishment of their crime was very fair. (1.) He did not punish it immediately, because he would not lose so much time from the pursuit of the enemy that were flying from him, because he would not seem to do it in a heat of passion, and because he would do it more to their shame and confusion when he had completed his undertaking, which they thought impracticable. But, (2.) He told them how he would punish it (v. 7, 9), to show the confidence he had of success in the strength of God, and that, if they had the least grain of grace and consideration left, they might upon second thoughts repent of their folly, humble themselves, and contrive how to atone for it, by sending after him succours and supplies, which if they had done, no doubt, Gideon would have pardoned them. God gives notice of danger, and space to repent, that sinners may *flee from the wrath to come*.

3. The warning being slighted, the punishment, though very severe, was really very just.

(1.) The princes of Succoth were first made examples. Gideon got intelligence of their number, seventy-seven men, their names, and places of abode, which were described in writing to him, v. 14. And, to their great surprise, when they thought he had scarcely overtaken the Midianites, he returned a conqueror. His 300 men were now the ministers of his justice; they secured all these princes, and brought them before Gideon, who showed them his royal captives in chains "These are the men you thought me an unequal match for, and would give me no assistance in the pursuit of," v. 15. And he punished them with thorns and briers, but, it should seem, not unto death. With these, [1.] He tormented their bodies, either by scourging or by rolling them in the thorns and briers; some way or other he *tore their flesh*, v. 7. Those shall have judgment without mercy that have shown no mercy. Perhaps he observed them to be soft and Jeli-

cate men, who despised him and his company for their roughness and hardness, and therefore Gideon thus mortified them for their effeminacy. [2.] He instructed their minds: With these *he taught the men of Succoth*, v. 16. The correction he gave them was intended, not for destruction, but wholesome discipline, to make them wiser and better for the future. *He made them know* (so the word is), made them know themselves and their folly, God and their duty, made them know who Gideon was, since they would not know by the success wherewith God had crowned him. Note, Many are taught with the briers and thorns of affliction that would not learn otherwise. God gives wisdom by the rod and reproof, chastens and teaches, and by correction opens the ear to discipline. Our blessed Saviour, though he was a Son, yet learnt obedience by the things which he suffered, Heb. v. 8. Let every pricking brier, and grieving thorn, especially when it becomes a thorn in the flesh, be thus interpreted, thus improved. "By this God designs to teach me; what good lesson shall I learn?"

(2.) The doom of the men of Penuel comes next, and it should seem he used them more severely than the other, for good reason, no doubt, v. 17. [1.] He beat down their tower, of which they gloried, in which they trusted, perhaps scornfully advising Gideon and his men rather to secure themselves in that than to pursue the Midianites. What men make their pride is justly by its ruin made their shame. [2.] He slew the men of the city, not all, perhaps not the elders or princes, but those that had affronted him, and those only. He slew some of the men of the city that were most insolent and abusive, for terror to the rest, and so he taught the men of Penuel.

18 Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. 19 And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. 20 And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. 21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

Judgment began at the house of God, in the just correction of the men of Succoth and

Penuel, who were Israelites, but it did not end there. The kings of Midian, when they had served to demonstrate Gideon's victories, and grace his triumphs, must now be reckoned with. 1. They are indicted for the murder of Gideon's brethren some time ago at Mount Tabor. When the children of Israel, for fear of the Midianites, made themselves dens in the mountains (ch. vi. 2), those young men, it is likely, took shelter in that mountain, where they were found by these two kings, and most basely and barbarously slain in cold blood. When he asks them what manner of men they were (v. 18), it is not because he was uncertain of the thing, or wanted proof of it; he was not so little concerned for his brethren's blood as not to enquire it out before now, nor were these proud tyrants solicitous to conceal it. But he puts that question to them that by their acknowledgment of the more than ordinary comeliness of the persons they slew their crime might appear the more heinous, and consequently their punishment the more righteous. They could not but own that, though they were found in a mean and abject condition, yet they had an unusual greatness and majesty in their countenances, not unlike Gideon himself at this time: they resembled the children of a king, born for something great. 2. Being found guilty of this murder by their own confession, Gideon, though he might have put them to death as Israel's judge for the injuries done to that people in general, as Oreb and Zeeb (ch. vii. 25), yet chooses rather to put on the character of an avenger of blood, as next of kin to the persons slain: They were my brethren, v. 19. Their other crimes might have been forgiven, at least Gideon would not have slain them himself, let them have answered it to the people; but the voice of his brethren's blood cries, cries to him, now it is in the power of his hand to avenge it, and therefore there is no remedy—by him must their blood be shed, though they were kings. Little did they think to hear of this so long after; but murder seldom goes unpunished even in this life. 3. The execution is done by Gideon himself with his own hand, because he was the avenger of blood; he bade his son slay them, for he was a near relation to the persons murdered, and fittest to be his father's substitute and representative, and he would thus train him up to the acts of justice and boldness, v. 20. But, (1.) The young man himself desired to be excused; he feared, though they were bound and could make no resistance, because he was yet a youth, and not used to such work: courage does not always run in the blood. (2.) The prisoners themselves desired that Gideon would excuse it (v. 21), begged that, if they must die, they might die by his own hand, which would be somewhat more honourable to them, and more easy; for by his great strength they would sooner be dispatched and rid out of

their pain. *As is the man, so is his strength.* Either they mean it of themselves (they were men of such strength as called for a better hand than that young man's to overpower quickly) or of Gideon, "Thou art at thy full strength; he has not yet come to it; therefore be thou the executioner." From those that are grown up to maturity, it is expected that what they do in any service be done with so much the more strength. Gideon dispatched them quickly, and seized the ornaments that were on their camels' necks, ornaments like the moon, so it is in the margin, either badges of their royalty or perhaps of their idolatry, for Ashteroth was represented by the moon, as Baal by the sun. With these he took all their other ornaments, as appears v. 26, where we find that he did not put them to so good a use as one would have wished. The destruction of these two kings, and that of the two princes (ch. vii. 25) is long afterwards pleaded as a precedent in prayer for the ruin of others of the church's enemies, Ps. lxxxiii. 11. *Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, and all their princes as Zebah and Zalmunna, let them all be cut off in like manner.*

22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. 23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you. 24 And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. 26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. 27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. 28 Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their

heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

Here is, I. Gideon's laudable modesty, after his great victory, in refusing the government which the people offered him. 1. It was honest in them to offer it: *Rule thou over us, for thou hast delivered us, v. 22.* They thought it very reasonable that he who had gone through the toils and perils of their deliverance should enjoy the honour and power of commanding them ever afterwards, and very desirable that he who in this great and critical juncture had had such manifest tokens of God's presence with him should ever afterwards preside in their affairs. Let us apply it to the Lord Jesus: he hath delivered us out of the hands of our enemies, our spiritual enemies, the worst and most dangerous, and therefore it is fit he should rule over us; for how can we be better ruled than by one that appears to have so great an interest in heaven and so great a kindness for this earth? We are delivered that we may serve him without fear, Luke i. 74, 75. 2. It was honourable in him to refuse it: *I will not rule over you, v. 23.* What he did was with a design to serve them, not to rule them—to make them safe, easy, and happy, not to make himself great or honourable. And, as he was not ambitious of grandeur himself, so he did not covet to entail it upon his family: "My son shall not rule over you, either while I live or when I am gone, but the Lord shall still rule over you, and constitute your judges by the special designation of his own Spirit, as he has done." This intimates, (1.) His modesty, and the mean opinion he had of himself and his own merits. He thought the honour of doing good was recompence enough for all his services, which needed not to be rewarded with the honour of bearing sway. *He that is greatest, let him be your minister* (2.) His piety, and the great opinion he had of God's government. Perhaps he discerned in the people a dislike of the theocracy, or divine government, a desire of a king like the nations, and thought they availed themselves of his merits as a colourable pretence to move for this change of government. But Gideon would by no means admit it. No good man can be pleased with any honour done to himself which ought to be peculiar to God. *Were you baptized in the name of Paul?* 1 Cor. i. 13.

II. Gideon's irregular zeal to perpetuate the remembrance of this victory by an ephod made of the choicest of the spoils. 1. He asked the men of Israel to give him the earrings of their prey; for such ornaments they stripped the slain of in abundance. These he demanded, either because they were the finest gold, and therefore fittest for a religious use, or because they had had as ear-rings some superstitious signification, which he thought too well of. Aaron called for the ear-rings



to make the golden calf of, Exod. xxxii. 2. These Gideon begged *v.* 24. And he had reason enough to think that those who offered him a crown, when he declined it, would not deny him their ear-rings, when he begged them, nor did they, *v.* 25. 2. He himself added the spoil he took from the kings of Midian, which, it should seem, had fallen to his share, *v.* 26. The generals had that part of the prey which was most splendid, the *prey of divers colours*, *ch.* v. 30. 3. Of this he made an ephod, *v.* 27. It was plausible enough, and might be well intended to preserve a memorial of so divine a victory in the judge's own city. But it was a very unadvised thing to make that memorial to be an ephod, a sacred garment. I would gladly put the best construction that can be upon the actions of good men, and such a one we are sure Gideon was. But we have reason to suspect that this ephod had, as usual, a teraphim annexed to it (Hos iii. 4), and that, having an altar already built by divine appointment (*ch.* vi. 26), which he erroneously imagined he might still use for sacrifice, he intended this for an oracle, to be consulted in doubtful cases. So the learned Dr. Spencer supposes. Each tribe having now very much its government within itself, they were too apt to covet their religion among themselves. We read very little of Shiloh, and the ark there, in all the story of the Judges. Sometimes by divine dispensation, and much oftener by the transgression of men, that law which obliged them to worship only at that one altar seems not to have been so religiously observed as one would have expected, any more than afterwards, when in the reigns even of very good kings *the high places were not taken away*, from which we may infer that that law had a further reach as a type of Christ, by whose mediation alone all our services are accepted. Gideon therefore, through ignorance or inconsideration, sinned in making this ephod, though he had a good intention in it. Shiloh, it is true, was not far off, but it was in Ephraim, and that tribe had lately disobliterated him (*v.* 1), which made him perhaps not care to go so often among them as his occasions would lead him to consult the oracle, and therefore he would have one nearer home. However this might be honestly intended, and at first did little hurt, yet in process of time, (1.) *Israel went a whoring after it*, that is, they deserted God's altar and priesthood, being fond of change, and prone to idolatry, and having some excuse for paying respect to this ephod, because so good a man as Gideon had set it up, and by degrees their respect to it grew more and more superstitious. Note, Many are led into false ways by one false step of a good man. The beginning of sin, particularly of idolatry and will-worship, is as the *letting forth of water*, so it has been found in the fatal corruptions of the church of Rome; therefore *leave it off before it be meddled with.*

(2.) It became a snare to Gideon himself, abating his zeal for the house of God in his old age, and much more to his house, who were drawn by it into sin, and it proved the ruin of the family.

III. Gideon's happy agency for the repose of Israel, *v.* 28. The Midianites that had been so vexatious gave them no more disturbance. Gideon, though he would not assume the honour and power of a king, governed as a judge, and did all the good offices he could for his people: so that *the country was in quietness forty years*. Hitherto the times of Israel had been reckoned by forties. Othniel judged forty years, Ehud eighty—just two forties, Barak forty, and now Gideon forty, providence so ordering it to bring in mind the forty years of their wandering in the wilderness. *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*. And see Ezek. iv. 6. After these, Eli ruled forty years (1 Sam. iv. 18), Samuel and Saul forty (Acts xiii. 21), David forty, and Solomon forty. Forty years is about an age.

29 And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. 30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. 33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. 34 And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: 35 Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, *namely*, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.

We have here the conclusion of the story of Gideon. 1. He lived privately, *v.* 29. He was not puffed up with his great honours, did not covet a palace or castle to dwell in, but retired to the house he had lived in before his elevation. Thus that brave Roman who was called from the plough upon a sudden occasion to command the army when the action was over returned to his plough again. 2. His family was multiplied. He had many wives (therein he transgressed the law); by them he had seventy sons (*v.* 30,) but by a concubine he had one whom he

named *Abimelech* (which signifies, *my father a king*), that proved the ruin of his family, r. 31. 3. He died in honour, in a good old age, when he had lived as long as he was capable of serving God and his country; and who would desire to live any longer? And he was buried in the sepulchre of his fathers. 4. After his death the people corrupted themselves, and went all to naught. As soon as ever Gideon was dead, who had kept them close to the worship of the God of Israel, they found themselves under no restraint, and then they went a whoring after *Baalim*, r. 33. They went a whoring first after another ephod (v. 27), for which irregularity Gideon had himself given them too much occasion, and now they went a whoring after another god. False worships made way for false deities. They now chose a new god (ch. v. 8), a god of a new name, *Baal-berith* (a goddess, say some); Berith, some think, was Berytus, the place where the Phœnicians worshipped this idol. The name signifies the *Lord of a covenant*. Perhaps he was so called because his worshippers joined themselves by covenant to him, in imitation of Israel's covenanting with God; for the devil is God's ape. In this revolt of Israel to idolatry they showed, (1.) Great ingratitude to God (v. 34): *They remembered not the Lord*, not only who had delivered them into the hands of their enemies, to punish them for their idolatry, but who had also delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, to invite them back again into his service; both the judgments and the mercies were forgotten, and the impressions of them lost. (2.) Great ingratitude to Gideon, r. 35. A great deal of goodness he had shown into Israel, as a father to his country, for which they ought to have been kind to his family when he was gone, for that is one way by which we ought to show ourselves grateful to our friends and benefactors, and may be returning their kindnesses when they are in their graves. But Israel showed not this kindness to Gideon's family, as we shall find in the next chapter. No wonder if those who forget their God forget their friends.

## CHAP. IX.

The apostasy of Israel after the death of Gideon is punished, not as the former apostasies by a foreign invasion, or the oppressions of any neighbouring power, but by intestine broils among themselves, which in this chapter we have the story of; and it is hard to say whether their sin or their misery appears most in it. It is an account of the usurpation and tyranny of Abimelech, who was Gideon's son; so we must call him, and not more modestly his natural son: he was so unlike him. We are here told, I. How he thrust himself into the government at Shechem, his own city, by subtlety and cruelty, particularly by the murder of all his brethren, ver. 1-6. II. How his doom was read in a parable by Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, ver. 7-21. III. What strifes there were between Abimelech and his friends the Shechemites, ver. 22-41. IV. How this ended in the ruin of the Shechemites (ver. 42-49), and of Abimelech himself, ver. 50-57. Of this meteor, this ignis fatuus of a prince, that was not a protector but a plague to his country, we may say, as once was said of a great tyrant, that he came in like a fox, ruled like a lion, and died like a dog. "For the transgression of a land, such are the princes thereof."

AND Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his

mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2 Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. 3 And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. 4 And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. 5 And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. 6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

We are here told by what arts Abimelech got into authority, and made himself great. His mother perhaps had instilled into his mind some towering ambitious thoughts, and the name his father gave him, carrying royalty in it, might help to blow up these sparks; and now that he has buried his father nothing will serve his proud spirit but he will succeed him in the government of Israel, directly contrary to his father's will, for he had declared *no son of his should rule over them*. He had no call from God to this honour as his father had, nor was there any present occasion for a judge to deliver Israel as there was when his father was advanced; but his own ambition must be gratified, and its gratification is all he aims at. Now observe here,

I. How craftily he got his mother's relations into his interests. Shechem was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, of great note. Joshua had held his last assembly there. If that city would but appear for him, and set him up, he thought it would go far in his favour. There he had an interest in the family of which his mother was, and by them he made an interest in the leading men of the city. It does not appear that any of them

had an eye to him as a man of merit, who had any thing to recommend him to such a choice, but the motion came first from himself. None would have dreamed of making such a one king, if he had not dreamed of it himself. And see here, 1. How he wheedled them into the choice, v. 2, 3. He basely suggested that Gideon having left seventy sons, who made a good figure and had a good interest, they were designing to keep the power which their father had in their hands, and by a joint-influence to reign over Israel. "Now," says he, "you had better have one king than more, than many, than so many. Affairs of state are best managed by a single person," v. 2. We have no reason to think that all or any of Gideon's sons had the least intention to reign over Israel (they were of their father's mind, that *the Lord should reign over them*, and they were not called of him), yet this he insinuates to pave the way to his own pretensions. Note, Those who design ill themselves are commonly most apt to suspect that others design ill. As for himself, he only puts them in mind of his relation to them (*verbum sapienti—A word to the wise is sufficient*): *Remember that I am your bone and your flesh*. The plot took wonderfully. The magistrates of Shechem were pleased to think of their city being a royal city and the metropolis of Israel, and therefore they inclined to follow him; for they said, "He is our brother, and his advancement will be our advantage." 2. How he got money from them to bear the charges of his pretensions (v. 4): *They gave him seventy pieces of silver*; it is not said what the value of these pieces was; so many shekels are less, and so many talents more, than we can well imagine; therefore it is supposed they were each a pound weight: but they gave this money out of the house of Baal-berith, that is, out of the public treasury, which, out of respect to their idol, they deposited in his temple to be protected by him; or out of the offerings that had been made to that idol, which they hoped would prosper the better in his hands for its having been consecrated to their god. How unfit was he to reign over Israel, because unlikely to defend them, who, instead of restraining and punishing idolatry, thus early made himself a pensioner to an idol! 3. What soldiers he enlisted. He hired into his service vain and light persons, the scum and scoundrels of the country, men of broken fortunes, giddy heads, and profligate lives; none but such would own him, and they were fittest to serve his purpose. Like leader like followers.

II. How cruelly he got his father's sons out of the way.

1. The first thing he did with the rabble he headed was to kill all his brethren at once, publicly and in cold blood, threescore and ten men, one only escaping, all slain upon one stone. See in this bloody tragedy, (1.) The power of ambition what beasts it

will turn men into, how it will break through all the ties of natural affection and natural conscience, and sacrifice that which is most sacred, dear, and valuable, to its designs. Strange that ever it should enter into the heart of a man to be so very barbarous! (2.) The peril of honour and high birth. Their being the sons of so great a man as Gideon exposed them thus and made Abimelech jealous of them. We find just the same number of Ahab's sons slain together at Samaria, 2 Kings x. 1, 7. The grand signiors have seldom thought themselves safe while any of their brethren have been unstrangled. Let none then envy those of high extraction, or complain of their own meanness and obscurity. The lower the safer

2. Way being thus made for Abimelech's election, the men of Shechem proceeded to choose him king, v. 6. God was not consulted whether they should have any king at all, much less who it should be; here is no advising with the priest or with their brethren of any other city or tribe, though it was designed that he should reign over Israel, v. 22. But, (1.) The Shechemites, as if they were the people and wisdom must die with them, did all; they aided and abetted him in the murder of his brethren (v. 24), and then they *made him king*. The men of Shechem (that is, the great men, the chief magistrates of the city), and the house of Millo (that is, the common-council, the *full house or house of fulness*, as the word signifies), those that met in their guildhall (we read often of the house of Millo, or state-house in Jerusalem, or the city of David, 2 Sam. v. 9; 2 Kings xii. 20), these gathered together, not to prosecute and punish Abimelech for this barbarous murder, as they ought to have done, he being one of their citizens, but to *make him king*. *Pretium sceleris tulit hic diadema—His wickedness was rewarded with a diadem*. What could they promise themselves from a king that laid the foundation of his kingdom in blood? (2.) The rest of the Israelites were so very sottish as to sit by unconcerned. They took no care to give check to this usurpation, to protect the sons of Gideon, or to avenge their death, but tamely submitted to the bloody tyrant, as men who with their religion had lost their reason, and all sense of honour and liberty, justice and gratitude. How vigorously had their fathers appeared to avenge the death of the Levite's concubine, and yet so wretchedly degenerate are they now as not to attempt the avenging of the death of Gideon's sons; it is for this that they are charged with ingratitude (ch. viii. 35): *Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal*.

7 And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken

unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. 8 The trees went forth *on a time* to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. 9 But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? 10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 11 But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? 12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? 14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 15 And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, *then* come *and* put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. 16 Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; 17 (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: 18 And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maid-servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he *is* your brother;) 19 If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: 20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. 21 And Jotham ran away, and fled, and

went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

We have here the only testimony that appears to have been borne against the wicked confederacy of Abimelech and the men of Shechem. It was a sign they had provoked God to depart from them that neither any prophet was sent nor any remarkable judgment, to awaken this stupid people, and to stop the progress of this threatening mischief. Only Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, who by a special providence escaped the common ruin of his family (v. 5), dealt plainly with the Shechemites, and his speech, which is here recorded, shows him to have been a man of such great ingenuity and wisdom, and really such an accomplished gentleman, that we cannot but the more lament the fall of Gideon's sons. Jotham did not go about to raise an army out of the other cities of Israel (in which, one would think, he might have made a good interest for his father's sake), to avenge his brethren's death, much less to set up himself in competition with Abimelech, so groundless was the usurper's suggestion that the sons of Gideon aimed at dominion (v. 2); but he contents himself with giving a faithful reproof to the Shechemites, and fair warning of the fatal consequences. He got an opportunity of speaking to them from the top of Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessings, at the foot of which probably the Shechemites were, upon some occasion (v. 2); gathered together (Josephus says, solemnizing a festival), and it seems they were willing to hear what he had to say.

I. His preface is very serious: "*Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you, v. 7.* As ever you hope to obtain God's favour, and to be accepted of him, give me a patient and impartial hearing." Note, Those who expect God to hear their prayers must be willing to hear reason, to hear a faithful reproof, and to hear the complaints and appeals of wronged innocence. *If we turn away our ear from hearing the law, our prayer will be an abomination, Prov. xxviii. 9.*

II. His parable is very ingenious—that when the trees were disposed to choose a king the government was offered to those valuable trees the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, but they refused it, choosing rather to serve than rule, to do good than bear sway. But the same tender being made to the bramble he accepted it with vain-glorious exultation. The way of instruction by parables is an ancient way, and very useful, especially to give reproofs by.

1. He hereby applauds the generous modesty of Gideon, and the other judges who were before him, and perhaps of the sons of Gideon, who had declined accepting the state and power of kings when they might have had them and likewise shows that it is in ge-

neral the temper of all wise and good men to decline preferment and to choose rather to be useful than to be great. (1.) There was no occasion at all for the trees to choose a king; they are all the *trees of the Lord which he has planted* (Ps. civ. 16) and which therefore he will protect. Nor was there any occasion for Israel to talk of setting a king over them; for *the Lord was their king*. (2.) When they had it in their thoughts to choose a king they did not offer the government to the stately cedar, or the lofty pine, which are only for show and shade, and not otherwise useful till they are cut down, but to the fruit-trees, the vine and the olive. Those that bear fruit for the public good are justly respected and honoured by all that are wise more than those that affect to make a figure. For a good useful man some *would even dare to die*. (3.) The reason which all these fruit-trees gave for their refusal was much the same. The olive pleads (v. 9), *Should I leave my fatness?* And the vine (v. 13), *Should I leave my wine*, wherewith both God and man are served and honoured? for oil and wine were used both at God's altars and at men's tables. And *shall I leave my sweetness, saith the fig-tree, and my good fruit* (v. 11), *and go to be promoted over the trees?* or, as the margin reads it, *go up and down for the trees?* It is intimated, [1.] That government involves a man in a great deal both of toil and care; he that is promoted over the trees must go up and down for them, and make himself a perfect drudge to business. [2.] That those who are preferred to places of public trust and power must resolve to forego all their private interests and advantages, and sacrifice them to the good of the community. The fig-tree must lose its sweetness, its sweet retirement, sweet repose, and sweet conversation and contemplation, if it go to be *promoted over the trees*, and must undergo a constant fatigue. [3.] That those who are advanced to honour and dignity are in great danger of losing their fatness and fruitfulness. Preferment is apt to make men proud and slothful, and thus spoil their usefulness, with which in a lower sphere they honoured God and man, for which reason those that desire to do good are afraid of being too great.

2. He hereby exposes the ridiculous ambition of Abimelech, whom he compares to the bramble or thistle, v. 14. He supposes the trees to make their court to him: *Come thou and reign over us*, perhaps because he knew not that the first motion of Abimelech's preferment came from himself (as we found, v. 2), but thought the Shechemites had proposed it to him; however, supposing it so, his folly in accepting it deserved to be chastised. The bramble is a worthless plant, not to be numbered among the trees, useless and fruitless, nay, hurtful and vexatious, scratching and tearing, and doing mischief; it began with the curse, and its end is to be

burned. Such a one was Abimelech, and yet chosen to the government *by the trees, by all the trees*; this election seems to have been more unanimous than any of the others. Let us not think it strange if we see *folly set in great dignity* (Eccl. x. 6), and the *richest men exalted* (Ps. xii. 8), and men blind to their own interest in the choice of their guides. The bramble, being chosen to the government, takes no time to consider whether he should accept it or no, but immediately, as if he had been born and bred to dominion, hectors, and assures them they shall find him as he found them. See what *great swelling words of vanity* he speaks (v. 15), what promises he makes to his faithful subjects: *Let them come and trust in my shadow*: a goodly shadow to trust in! How unlike to the *shadow of a great rock in a weary land*, which a good magistrate is compared to! Isa. xxxii. 2. *Trust in his shadow!*—more likely to be scratched if they came near him—more likely to be injured by him than benefited. Thus men *boast of a false gift*. Yet he threatens with as much confidence as he promises: *If you be not faithful, let fire come out of the bramble* (a very unlikely thing to emit fire) and *devour the cedars of Lebanon*—more likely to catch fire, and be itself devoured.

III. His application is very close and plain. In it, 1. He reminds them of the many good services his father had done for them, v. 17. He fought their battles, at the hazard of his own life, and to their unspeakable advantage. It was a shame that they needed to be put in mind of this. 2. He aggravates their unkindness to his father's family. They had not *done to him according to the deserving of his hands*, v. 16. Great merits often meet with very ill returns, especially to posterity, when the benefactor is forgotten, as Joseph was among the Egyptians. Gideon had left many sons that were an honour to his name and family, and these they had barbarously murdered; one son he had left that was the blemish of his name and family, for he was *the son of his maid-servant*, whom all that had any respect to Gideon's honour would endeavour to conceal, yet him they made their king. In both they put the utmost contempt imaginable upon Gideon. 3. He leaves it to the event to determine whether they had done well, whereby he lodges the appeal with the divine providence. (1.) If they prospered long in this villany, he would give them leave to say they had done well, v. 19. "If your conduct towards the house of Gideon be such as can be justified at any bar of justice, honour, or conscience, much good may it do you with your new king." But, (2.) If they had, as he was sure they had, dealt basely and wickedly in this matter, let them never expect to prosper, v. 20. Abimelech and the Shechemites, that had strengthened one another's hands in this villany, would cer-

tainly be a plague and ruin one to another. Let none expect to do ill and fare well.

Jotham, having given them this admonition, made a shift to escape with his life, *v. r. 21.* Either they could not reach him or they were so far convinced that they would not add the guilt of his blood to all the rest. But, for fear of Abimelech, he lived in exile, in some remote obscure place. Those whose extraction and education are ever so high know not to what difficulties and straits they may be reduced.

22 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, 23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: 24 That the cruelty *done* to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. 25 And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech. 26 And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27 And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode *the grapes*, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. 28 And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *is* not *he* the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him? 29 And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out. 30 And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. 31 And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. 32 Now there-

fore up by night, thou and the people that *is* with thee, and lie in wait in the field: 33 And it shall be, *that* in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, *when* he and the people that *is* with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion. 34 And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that *were* with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that *were* with him, from lying in wait. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as *if* they were men. 37 And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim. 38 Then said Zebul unto him, Where *is* now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who *is* Abimelech, that we should serve him? *is* not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them. 39 And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown *and* wounded, *even* unto the entering of the gate. 41 And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. 42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. 43 And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people *were* come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. 44 And Abimelech, and the company that *was* with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city

and the two *other* companies ran upon all *the people* that *were* in the fields, and slew them. 45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that *was* therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt. 46 And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard *that*, they entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid *it* on his shoulder, and said unto the people that *were* with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, *and do as I have done*. 49 And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put *them* to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

Three years Abimelech reigned, after a sort, without any disturbance; it is not said, He judged Israel, or did any service at all to his country, but so long he enjoyed the title and dignity of a king; and not only the Shechemites, but many other places, paid him respect. They must have been fond of a king that could please themselves with such a one as this. But the triumphing of the wicked is short. *Within three years, as the years of a hireling, all this glory shall be contemned, and laid in the dust, Isa. xvi. 14.* The ruin of these confederates in wickedness was from the righteous hand of the God to whom vengeance belongs. *He sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the Shechemites (v. 23),* that is, they grew jealous one of another and ill-affected one to another. He slighted those that set him up, and perhaps countenanced other cities which now began to come into his interests more than he did theirs; and then they grew uneasy at his government, blamed his conduct, and quarrelled at his impositions. This was from God. He permitted the devil, that great mischief-maker, to sow discord between them, and he is *an evil spirit*, whom God not only keeps under his check, but sometimes serves his own purposes by. Their own lusts were evil spirits; they are devils in men's own hearts; from them come wars and

fightings. These God gave them up to, and so might be said to *send the evil spirits between them*. When men's sin is made their punishment, though God is not the author of the sin, yet the punishment is from him. The quarrel God had with Abimelech and the Shechemites was for the murder of the sons of Gideon (v. 24): *That the cruelty done to them might come and their blood be laid as a burden upon Abimelech that slew them, and the men of Shechem that helped him.* Note, 1. Sooner or later God will make inquiry for blood, innocent blood, and will return it on the heads of those that shed it, who shall have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. 2. Accessaries shall be reckoned with, as well as principals, in that and other sins. The Shechemites that countenanced Abimelech's pretensions, aided and abetted him in his bloody project, and avowed the fact by making him king after he had done it, must fall with him, fall by him, and fall first. 3. Those that combine together to do wickedly are justly dashed in pieces one against another. Blood cannot be a lasting cement to any interest.

1. The Shechemites began to affront Abimelech, perhaps they scarcely knew why or wherefore, but they were given to change. 1. *They dealt treacherously with him, v. 23.* It is not said, They repented of their sin in owning him. Had they done so, it would have been laudable to disown him; but they did it only upon some particular pique conceived against him by their pride or envy. Those that set him up were the first that deserted him and endeavoured to dethrone him. It is not strange that those who were ungrateful to Gideon were unfaithful to Abimelech; for what will hold those that will not be held by the obligation of such merits as Gideon's? Note, It is just with God that those who tempt others to be once perfidious should afterwards be themselves betrayed by those whom they have taught to be perfidious. 2. They aimed to seize him when he was at Arumah (v. 41), his country-seat. Expecting him to come to town, they set *hers in wait for him (v. 25)*, who should make him their prisoner whom they had lately made their prince. Those who were thus posted, he not coming, took the opportunity of robbing travellers, which would help to make the people more and more uneasy under Abimelech, when they saw he could not or would not protect them from highway-men. 3. They entertained one Gaal, and set him up as their head in opposition to Abimelech, v. 26. This Gaal is said to be the son of *Ebed*, which signifies *a servant*, perhaps denoting the meanness of his extraction. As Abimelech was by the mother's side, so he by the father's, the son of a servant. Here was one bramble contesting with another. We have reason to suspect that this Gaal was a native Canaanite, because he courts the Shechemites into sub-

jection to the men of Hamor, who was the ancient lord of this city in Jacob's time. He was a bold ambitious man, served their purpose admirably well when they were disposed to quarrel with Abimelech, and they also served his purpose; so he went over to them to blow the coals, and they put their confidence in him. 4. They did all the despite they could to Abimelech's name, v. 27. They made themselves very merry in his absence, as those who were glad he was out of the way, and who, now that they had another to head them, were in hopes to get clear of him; nay, they went into the house of their god, to solemnize their feast of in-gathering, and there they did eat, and drink, and cursed Abimelech, not only said all the ill they could of him in their table-talk and the song of their drunkards, but wished all the ill they could to him over their sacrifices, praying to their idol to destroy him. They drank healths to his confusion, and with as loud huzzas as ever they had drunk them to his prosperity. That very temple whence they had fetched money to set him up with did they now meet in to curse him and contrive his ruin. Had they deserted their idol-god with their image-king, they might have hoped to prosper; but, while they still cleave to the former, the latter shall cleave to them to their ruin. How should Satan cast out Satan? 5. They pleased themselves with Gaal's vaunted defiance of Abimelech, v. 28, 29. They loved to hear that impudent upstart speak scornfully, (1.) Of Abimelech, though calling him in disdain *Shechem*, or a *Shechemite*, he reflected upon their own city. (2.) Of his good father likewise, Gideon: *Is not he the son of Jerubbaal?* So he calls him, perhaps in an impious indignation at his name and memory for throwing down the altar of Baal, turning that to his reproach which was his praise. (3.) Of his prime minister of state, *Zebul his officer, and ruler of the city*. "We may well be ashamed to serve them, and need not be afraid to oppose them." Men of turbulent ambitious spirits thus despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Gaal aimed not to recover Shechem's liberty, only to change their tyrant: "*O that this people were under my hand!* What I would do! I would challenge Abimelech to try titles for the crown;" and it should seem he desired his friends to send him word that he was ready to dispute it with him whenever he pleased: "*Increase thy army, and come out. Do thy worst; let the point be determined by the sword.*" This pleased the Shechemites, who were now as sick of Abimelech as ever they had been fond of him. Men of no conscience will be men of no constancy.

11. Abimelech turned all his force upon them, and, in a little time, quite ruined them. Observe the steps of their overthrow.

1. The Shechemites' counsels were betrayed to Abimelech by Zebul his confidant, the

ruler of the city, who continued hearty for him. *His anger was kindled* (v. 30), and the more because Gaal had spoken slightly of him (v. 28), for perhaps, if he had complimented and caressed him now that things were in this ferment, he might have gained him to his interest; but he, being disobliged, sends notice to Abimelech of all that was said and done in Shechem against him, v. 31. Betrayers are often betrayed by some among themselves, and the cursing of the king is sometimes strangely carried by a bird of the air. He prudently advises him to come against the city immediately, and lose no time, v. 32, 33. He thinks it best that he should march his forces by night into the neighbourhood, surprise the city in the morning, and then make the best of his advantages. How could the Shechemites hope to speed in their attempt when the ruler of their city was in the interests of their enemy? They knew it, and yet took no care to secure him.

2. Gaal, that headed their faction, having been betrayed by Zebul, Abimelech's confidant, was most wretchedly bantered by him. Abimelech, according to Zebul's advice, drew all his forces down upon Shechem by night, v. 34. Gaal, in the morning, went out to the gate (v. 35) to see what posture things were in, and to enquire, What news? Zebul, as a ruler of the city, met him there as a friend. Abimelech and his forces beginning to move towards the city, Gaal discovers them (v. 36), takes notice of their approach to Zebul that was standing with him, little thinking that he had sent for them and was now expecting them. "Look," says he, "do not I see a body of men coming down from the mountain towards us? Yonder they are," pointing to the place. "No, no," says Zebul; "thy eye-sight deceives thee; it is but the shadow of the mountains which thou takest to be an army." By this he intended, (1.) To ridicule him, as a man of no sense or spirit, and therefore very unfit for what he pretended to, as a man that might easily be imposed upon and made to believe any thing, and that was so silly and so cowardly that he apprehended danger where there was none, and was ready to fight with a shadow. (2.) To detain him, and hold him in talk, while the forces of Abimelech were coming up, that thereby they might gain advantage. But when Gaal, being content to believe those he now saw to be but the shadow of the mountains (perhaps the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, which lay close by the city), was undeceived by the discovery of two other companies that marched apace towards the city, then Zebul took another way to banter him, upbraiding him with what he had said but a day or two before, in contempt of Abimelech (v. 38): *Where is now thy mouth, that foul mouth of thine, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech?* Note, Proud and haughty people are often made in a little time to change their note, and to dread those whom they had



most despised. Gaal had, in a bravado, challenged Abimelech to *increase his army and come out*; but now Zebul, in Abimelech's name, challenges him: *Go out, and fight with them, if thou darest. Justly are the insolent thus insulted over.*

3. Abimelech routed Gaal's forces that sallied out of the town, v. 39, 40. Gaal, disheartened no doubt by Zebul's hectoring him, and perceiving his interest weaker than he thought it was, though he marched out against Abimelech with what little force he had, was soon put to the worst, and obliged to retire into the city with great precipitation. In this action the Shechemites' loss was considerable: *Many were overthrown and wounded*, the common effect of popular tumults, in which the inconsiderate multitude are often drawn into fatal snares by those that promise them glorious success.

4. Zebul that night expelled Gaal, and the party he had brought with him into Shechem, out of the city (v. 41), sending him to the place whence he came. For though the generality of the city continued still averse to Abimelech, as appears by the sequel of the story, yet they were willing to part with Gaal, and did not oppose his expulsion, because, though he had talked big, both his skill and courage had failed him when there was occasion for them. Most people judge of men's fitness for business by their success, and he that does not speed well is concluded not to do well. Well, Gaal's interest in Shechem is soon at an end, and he that had talked of removing Abimelech is himself removed, nor do we ever hear of him any more. *Exit Gaal—Gaal retires.*

5. Abimelech, the next day, set upon the city, and quite destroyed it, for their treacherous dealings with him. Perhaps Abimelech had notice of their expelling Gaal, who had headed the faction, with which they thought he would have been satisfied, but the crime was too deep to be thus atoned for, and his resentments were too keen to be pacified by so small an instance of submission, besides that it was more Zebul's act than theirs; by it their hands were weakened, and therefore he resolved to follow his blow, and effectually to chastise their treachery. (1.) He had intelligence brought him that the people of Shechem had come out *into the field*, v. 42. Some think into the field of business to plough and sow (having lately gathered in their harvest), or to perfect their harvest, for it was only their vintage that they had made an end of (v. 27), and then it intimates that they were secure. And because Abimelech had retired (v. 41) they thought themselves in no danger from him, and then the issue of it is an instance of sudden destruction coming upon those that cry, Peace and safety. Others think they went out into the field of battle; though Gaal was driven out, they would not lay down their arms, but put themselves into a posture for another engagement with Abi-

melech, in which they hoped to retrieve what they had lost the day before. (2.) He himself, with a strong detachment, cut off the communication between them and the city, *stood in the entering of the gate* (v. 44), that they might neither make their retreat into the city nor receive any succours from the city, and then sent two companies of his men, who were too strong for them, and they put them all to the sword, *ran upon those that were in the fields and slew them*. When we go out about our business we are not sure that we shall come home again; there are deaths both in the city and in the field. (3.) He then fell upon the city itself, and, with a rage reaching up to heaven, though it was the place of his nativity, laid it in ruins, slew all the people, beat down all the buildings, and, in token of his desire that it might be a perpetual desolation, sowed it with salt, that it might remain a lasting monument of the punishment of perfidiousness. Yet Abimelech prevailed not to make its desolations perpetual; for it was afterwards rebuilt, and became so considerable a place that all Israel came thither to make Rehoboam king, 1 Kings xii. 1. And the place proved an ill omen. Abimelech intended hereby to punish the Shechemites for their slighting him now, but God intended to punish them for their serving him formerly in the murder of Gideon's sons. Thus, when God makes use of men as instruments in his hand to do his work, he means one thing and they another, Isa. x. 6, 7. They design to maintain their honour, but God to maintain his.

6. Those that retired into a strong-hold of their idol-temple were all destroyed there. These are called *the men of the tower of Shechem* (v. 46, 47), some castle that belonged to the city, but lay at some distance from it. They, hearing of the destruction of the city, withdrew into a hold of the temple, trusting, it is likely, not so much to its strength as to its sanctity; they put themselves under the protection of their idol: for thus *all people will walk in the name of their god*, and shall not we then choose to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life? *For in the time of trouble he shall hide us in his pavilion*, Ps. xxvii. 5. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*, Prov. xviii. 10. But that which they hoped would be for their welfare proved to them a snare and a trap, as those will certainly find that run to idols for shelter; it will prove a refuge of lies. When Abimelech had them altogether penned up in that hold he desired no more. That barbarous project immediately came into his head of setting fire to the strong-hold, and, so to speak, burning all the birds together in the nest. He kept the design to himself, but set all his men on work to expedite the execution of it, v. 48, 49. He ordered them all to follow him, and do as he did: as his father had said to his men (ch. vii. 17), *Look on me, and do likewise*; so saith he to his, as becomes a

general that will not be wanting to give both the plainest direction and the highest encouragement that can be to his soldiers: *What you have seen me do make haste to do, as I have done. Not Ite illuc—Go thither; but Venite huc—Come hither.* The officers in Christ's army should thus teach by their example, Phil. iv. 9. He and they fetched each of them a bough from a wood not far off; laid all their boughs together under the wail of this tower, which it is probable was of wood, set fire to their boughs, and so burnt down their hold and all that were in it, who were either burnt or stifled with the smoke. What inventions men have to destroy one another! Whence come these cruel wars and fightings but from their lusts? Some think that the men of the tower of Shechem were the same with the house of Millo, and then Jotham's just imprecation was answered in the letter: *Let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour not only in general the men of Shechem, but in particular the house of Millo, v. 20.* About 1000 men and women perished in these flames, many of whom, it is probable, were no way concerned in the quarrel between Abimelech and the Shechemites, nor meddled with either side, yet, in this civil war, they came to this miserable end; for men of factious turbulent spirits *perish not alone in their iniquity, but involve many more, that follow them in their simplicity, in the same calamity with them.*

50 Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. 52 And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his scull. 54 Then he called hastily unto the young man his armour bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. 56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: 57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon

their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

We have seen the ruin of the Shechemites completed by the hand of Abimelech; and now it comes to his turn to be reckoned with who was their leader in villany. Thebez was a small city, probably not far from Shechem, dependent upon it, and in confederacy with it. Now,

I. Abimelech attempted the destruction of this city (v. 50), drove all the inhabitants of the town into the castle, or citadel, v. 51. When he had them there he did not doubt but he should do the same execution here that he had lately done at the strong-hold of the temple of Baal-berith, not considering that the tower of an idol-temple lay more exposed to divine vengeance than any other tower. He attempted to set fire to this tower, at least to burn down the door, and so force an entrance, v. 52. Those who have escaped and succeeded well in one desperate attempt are apt to think the like attempt another time not desperate. This instance was long after quoted to show how dangerous it is to come near the wall of a besieged city, 2 Sam. xi. 20, &c. But God infatuates those whom he will ruin.

II. In the attempt he was himself destroyed, having his brains knocked out with a piece of a millstone, v. 57. *No doubt this man was a murderer, whom, though he had escaped the dangers of the war with Shechem, yet vengeance suffered not to live, Acts xxviii.*

4. *Evil pursues sinners,* and sometimes overtakes them when they are not only secure, but triumphant. Thebez, we may suppose, was a weak inconsiderable place, compared with Shechem. Abimelech, having conquered the greater, makes no doubt of being master of the less without any difficulty, especially when he had taken the city, and had only the tower to deal with; yet he lays his bones by that, and there is all his honour buried. Thus are the *mighty things of the world* often confounded by the weakest and those things that are most made light of. See here what rebukes those are justly put under many times by the divine providence that are unreasonable in their demands of satisfaction for injuries received. Abimelech had some reason to chastise the Shechemites, and he had done it with a witness; but when he will carry his revenges further, and nothing will serve but that Thebez also must be sacrificed to his rage, he is not only disappointed there, but destroyed; *for verily there is a God that judges in the earth.* Three circumstances are worthy of observation in the death of Abimelech:—1. That he was slain with a stone, as he had slain his brethren all *upon one stone.* 2. That he had his skull broken. Vengeance aimed at that guilty head which had worn the usurped crown. 3. That the stone was cast upon him by a woman, v. 53. He saw the stone come;

it was therefore strange he did not avoid it, but, no doubt, this made it so much the greater mortification to him to see from what hand it came. Sisera died by a woman's hand and knew it not; but Abimelech not only fell by the hand of a woman but knew it, and, when he found himself ready to breathe his last, nothing troubled him so much as this, that it should be said, A woman slew him. See, (1.) His foolish pride, in laying so much to heart this little circumstance of his disgrace. Here was no care taken about his precious soul, no concern what would become of that, no prayer to God for his mercy; but very solicitous he is to patch up his shattered credit, when there is no patching his shattered skull. "O let it never be said that such a mighty man as Abimelech was killed by a woman!" The man was dying, but his pride was alive and strong, and the same vain-glorious humour that had governed him all along appears now at last. *Qualis vita, finis ita—As was his life, such was his death.* As God punished his cruelty by the manner of his death, so he punished his pride by the instrument of it. (2.) His foolish project to avoid this disgrace; nothing could be more ridiculous: his own servant must run him through, not to rid him the sooner out of his pain, but that men say not, *A woman slew him.* Could he think that this would conceal what the woman had done, and not rather proclaim it the more? Nay, it added to the infamy of his death, for hereby he became a self-murderer. Better have it said, *A woman slew him,* than that it should be said, His servant slew him by his own order; yet now both will be said of him to his everlasting reproach. And it is observable that this very thing which Abimelech was in such care to conceal appears to have been more particularly remembered by posterity than most passages of his history; for Joab speaks of it as that which he expected David would reproach him with, for coming so *nigh the wall*, 2 Sam. xi. 21. The ignominy we seek to avoid by sin we do but perpetuate the remembrance of.

III. The issue of all is that Abimelech being slain, 1. Israel's peace was restored, and an end was put to this civil war; for those that followed him *departed every man to his place*, v. 55. 2. God's justice was glorified (v. 56, 57): *Thus God punished the wickedness of Abimelech, and of the men of Shechem,* and fulfilled Jotham's curse, for it was not a *curse causeless*. Thus he preserved the honour of his government, and gave warning to all ages to expect blood for blood. *The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes, when the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.* Though wickedness may prosper awhile, it will not prosper always.

## CHAP. X.

In this chapter we have, 1. The peaceable times Israel enjoyed under the government of two judges, Tola and Jair, ver. 1—8. II. The troublesome times that ensued. 1. Israel's sin that

brought them into trouble, ver. 6. 2. The trouble itself they were in, ver. 7—9. III. Their repentance and humiliation for sin, their prayers and reformation, and the mercy they found with God thereupon, ver. 10—16. IV. Preparation made for their deliverance out of the hand of their oppressors, ver. 17, 18.

AND after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. 2 And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir. 3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. 4 And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

Quiet and peaceable reigns, though the best to live in, are the worst to write of, as yielding least variety of matter for the historian to entertain his reader with; such were the reigns of these two judges, Tola and Jair, who make but a small figure and take up but a very little room in this history. But no doubt they were both *raised up of God* to serve their country in the quality of judges, not pretending, as Abimelech had done, to the grandeur of kings, nor, like him, taking the honour they had to themselves, but being called of God to it. 1. Concerning Tola it is said that he arose after Abimelech to defend Israel, v. 1. After Abimelech had debauched Israel by his wickedness, disquieted and disturbed them by his restless ambition, and, by the mischiefs he brought on them, exposed them to enemies from abroad, God animated this good man to appear for the reforming of abuses, the putting down of idolatry, the appeasing of tumults, and the healing of the wounds given to the state by Abimelech's usurpation. Thus he saved them from themselves, and guarded them against their enemies. He was of the tribe of Issachar, a tribe disposed to serve, for he *bowed his shoulder to bear* (Gen. xlix. 14, 15), yet one of that tribe is here raised up to rule; for those that humble themselves shall be exalted. He bore the name of him that was ancestor to the first family of that tribe; of the sons of Issachar Tola was the first, Gen. xlii. 13; Num. xxvi. 23. It signifies a *worm*, yet, being the name of his ancestor, he was not ashamed of it. Though he was of Issachar, yet, when he was raised up to the government, he came and dwelt in Mount Ephraim, which was more in the heart of the country, that the people might the more conveniently resort to him for judgment. He judged Israel twenty-three years (v. 2), kept things in good order, but did not any thing very memorable. 2. Jair was a Gileadite, so was his next successor

Jephthah, both of that half tribe of the tribe of Manasseh which lay on the other side Jordan; though they seemed separated from their brethren, yet God took care, while the honour of the government was shifted from tribe to tribe and before it settled in Judah, that those who lay remote should sometimes share in it, *putting more abundant honour on that part which lacked.* Jair bore the name of a very famous man of the same tribe who in Moses's time was very active in reducing this country, Num. xxxii. 41; Josh. xiii. 30. That which is chiefly remarkable concerning this Jair is the increase and honour of his family: *He had thirty sons, v. 4.* And, (1.) They had good preferments, for they *rode on thirty ass colts*; that is, they were judges itinerant, who, as deputies to their father, rode from place to place in their several circuits to administer justice. We find afterwards that Samuel made his sons judges, though he could not make them good ones, 1 Sam. viii. 1—3. (2.) They had good possessions, every one a city, out of those that were called, from their ancestor of the same name with their father, *Haroth-jair—the villages of Jair*; yet they are called *cities*, either because those young gentlemen to whom they were assigned enlarged and fortified them, and so improved them into cities, or because they were as well pleased with their lot in those country towns as if they had been cities compact together and fenced with gates and bars. Villages are cities to a contented mind.

6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. 7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. 8 And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. 9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

While those two judges, Tola and Jair, presided in the affairs of Israel, things went well, but afterwards,

I. Israel returned to their idolatry, that sin which did most easily beset them (r. 6) *They did evil again in the sight of the Lord*, from whom they were unaccountably bent to backslide, as a *foolish people and unwise.*

1. They worshipped many gods; not only their old demons Baalim and Ashtaroth, which the Canaanites had worshipped, but, as if they would proclaim their folly to all their neighbours, they served the gods of Syria, Zidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. It looks as if the chief trade of Israel had been to import deities from all countries. It is hard to say whether it was more impious or impolitic to do this. By introducing these foreign deities, they rendered themselves mean and despicable, for no nation that had any sense of honour changed their gods. Much of the wealth of Israel, we may suppose, was carried out, in offerings to the temples of the deities in the several countries whence they came, on which, as their mother-churches, their temples in Israel were expected to own their dependence; the priests and devotees of those sorry deities would follow their gods, no doubt, in crowds into the land of Israel, and, if they could not live in their own country, would take root there, and so *strangers would decour their strength.* If they did it in compliment to the neighbouring nations, and to ingratiate themselves with them, justly were they disappointed; for those nations which by their wicked arts they sought to make their friends by the righteous judgments of God became their enemies and oppressors. *In quo quis peccat, in eo punitur—Wherein a person offends, therein he shall be punished.* 2. They did not so much as admit the God of Israel to be one of those many deities they worshipped, but quite cast him off: *They forsook the Lord, and served not him at all.* Those that think to serve both God and Mammon will soon come entirely to forsake God, and to serve Mammon only. If God have not all the heart, he will soon have none of it.

II. God renewed his judgments upon them, bringing them under the power of oppressing enemies. Had they fallen into the hands of the Lord immediately, they might have found that *his mercies were great*; but God let them fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines that lay south-west of Canaan, and of the Ammonites that lay north-east, both at the same time; so that between those two millstones they were miserably crushed, as the original word is (v. 8), *for oppressed.* God had appointed that, if any of the cities of Israel should revolt to idolatry, the rest should make war upon them and cut them off; Deut. xiii. 12, &c. They had been jealous enough in this matter, almost to an extreme, in the case of the altar set up by the two tribes and a half (Josh. xxii.); but now they had grown so very bad that when one city was infected with idolatry the next took the infection and instead of punishing it,

imitated and out-did it; and therefore, since those that should have been revengers to *execute wrath on those that did this evil* were themselves guilty, or *bore the sword in vain*, God brought the neighbouring nations upon them, to chastise them for their apostasy. The oppression of Israel by the Ammonites, the posterity of Lot, was, 1. Very long. It continued eighteen years. Some make those years to be part of the judgeship of Jair, who could not prevail to reform and deliver Israel as he would. Others make them to commence at the death of Jair, which seems the more probable because that part of Israel which was most infested by the Ammonites was Gilead, Jair's own country, which we cannot suppose to have suffered so much while he was living, but that part at least would be reformed and protected. 2. Very grievous. They vexed them and oppressed them. It was a great vexation to be oppressed by such a despicable people as the children of Ammon were. They began with those tribes that lay next them on the other side Jordan, here called *the land of the Amorites* (v. 8) because the Israelites had so wretchedly degenerated, and had made themselves so like the heathen, that they had become, in a manner, perfect Amorites (Ezek. xvi. 3), or because by their sin they forfeited their title to this land, so that it might justly be looked upon as *the land of the Amorites* again, from whom they took it. But by degrees they pushed forward, came over Jordan, and invaded Judah, and Benjamin, and Ephraim (v. 9), three of the most famous tribes of Israel, yet thus insulted when they had forsaken God, and unable to make head against the invader. Now the threatening was fulfilled that they should be *slain before their enemies*, and should have *no power to stand before them*, Lev. xxvi. 17, 37. Their *ways and their doings procure this to themselves*; they have sadly degenerated, and so they come to be sorely distressed.

10 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim. 11 And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, *Did not I deliver you* from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? 12 The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. 13 Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in

the time of your tribulation. 15 And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. 16 And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. 17 Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh. 18 And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man *is he* that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

Here is, I. A humble confession which Israel make to God in their distress, v. 10. Now they own themselves guilty, like a malefactor upon the rack, and promise reformation, like a child under the rod. They not only complain of the distress, but acknowledge it is their own sin that has brought them into the distress; therefore God is righteous, and they have no reason to repine. They confess their omissions, for in them their sin began—"We have forsaken our God," and their commissions—"We have served Baalim, and herein have done foolishly, treacherously, and very wickedly."

II. A humbling message which God thereupon sends to Israel, whether by an angel (as *ch. ii. 1*) or by a prophet (as *ch. vi. 8*) is not certain. It was kind that God took notice of their cry, and did not turn a deaf ear to it and send them no answer at all; it was kind likewise that when they began to repent he sent them such a message as was proper to increase their repentance, that they might be qualified and prepared for deliverance. Now in this message, 1. He upbraids them with their great ingratitude, reminds them of the great things he had done for them, delivering them from such and such enemies, the Egyptians first, out of whose land they were rescued, the Amorites whom they conquered and into whose land they entered, and since their settlement there, when the Ammonites had joined with the Moabites to oppress them (*ch. iii. 13*), when the Philistines were vexatious in the days of Shamgar, and afterwards other enemies had given them trouble, upon their petition God had wrought many a great salvation for them, v. 11, 12. Of their being oppressed by the Zidonians and the Maonites we read not elsewhere. God had in justice corrected them, and in mercy delivered them, and therefore might reasonably expect that either through fear or through love they would adhere to him

and his service. Well therefore might the word cut them to the heart (v. 13), "Yet you have forsaken me that have brought you out of your troubles and served other gods that brought you into your troubles." Thus did they forsake their own mercies for their own delusions. 2. He shows them how justly he might now abandon them to ruin, by abandoning them to the gods that they had served. To awaken them to a thorough repentance and reformation, he lets them see, (1.) Their folly in serving Baalim. They had been at a vast expense to obtain the favour of such gods as could not help them when they had most need of their help: "Go, and cry unto the gods which you have chosen (v. 14), try what they can do for you now. You have worshipped them as gods—try if they have now either a divine power or a divine goodness to be employed for you. You paid your homage to them as your kings and lords—try if they will now protect you. You brought your sacrifices of praise to their altars as your benefactors, imagining that they gave you your corn, and wine, and oil, but a friend indeed will be a friend in need; what stead will their favour stand you in now?" Note, It is necessary, in true repentance, that there be a full conviction of the utter insufficiency of all those things to help us and do us any kindness which we have idolized and set upon the throne in our hearts in competition with God. We must be convinced that the pleasures of sense on which we have doted cannot be our satisfaction, nor the wealth of the world which we have coveted be our portion, that we cannot be happy or easy any where but in God. (2.) Their misery and danger in forsaking God. "See what a pass you have brought yourselves to; now you can expect no other than that I should say, *I will deliver you no more*, and what will become of you then?" v. 13. This he tells them, not only as what he might do, but as what he would do if they rested in a confession of what they had done amiss, and did not put away their idols and amend for the future.

III. A humble submission which Israel hereupon made to God's justice, with a humble application to his mercy, v. 15. The children of Israel met together, probably in a solemn assembly at the door of the tabernacle, received the impressions of the message God had sent them, were not driven by it in despair, though it was very threatening, but resolve to lie at God's feet, and, if they perish, they will perish there. They not only repeat their confession, *We have sinned*, but, 1. They surrender themselves to God's justice: *Do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee*. Hereby they own that they deserved the severest tokens of God's displeasure and were sure he could do them no wrong, whatever he laid upon them; they humbled themselves under his mighty and heavy hand, and *accepted of the punishment*

of their iniquity, which Moses had made the condition of God's return in mercy to them. Lev. xxvi. 41. Note, True penitents dare and will refer themselves to God to correct them as he thinks fit, knowing that their sin is highly malignant in its deserts, and that God is not rigorous or extreme in his demands. 2. They supplicate for God's mercy: *Deliver us only, we pray thee, this day*, from this enemy. They acknowledge what they deserved, yet pray to God not to deal with them according to their deserts. Note, We must submit to God's justice with a hope in his mercy.

IV. A blessed reformation set on foot hereupon. They brought forth fruits meet for repentance (v. 16): *They put away the gods of strangers* (as the word is), strange gods, and worshipped by those nations that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and to the covenants of promise, and they served the Lord. Need drove them to him. They knew it was to no purpose to go to the gods whom they had served, and therefore returned to the God whom they had slighted. This is true repentance not only for sin, but from sin.

V. God's gracious return in mercy to them, which is expressed here very tenderly (v. 16): *His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*. Not that there is any grief in God (he has infinite joy and happiness in himself, which cannot be broken in upon by either the sins or the miseries of his creatures), nor that there is any change in God: *he is in one mind, and who can turn him?* But his goodness is his glory. By it he proclaims his name, and magnifies it above all names; and, as he is pleased to put himself into the relation of a father to his people that are in covenant with him, so he is pleased to represent his goodness to them by the compassions of a father towards his children; for, as he is the Father of lights, so he is the Father of mercies. As the disobedience and misery of a child are a grief to a tender father, and make him feel very sensibly from his natural affection, so the provocations of God's people are a grief to him (Ps. xc. 10), *he is broken with their whorish heart* (Ezek. vi. 9); their troubles also are a grief to him; so he is pleased to speak when he is pleased to appear for the deliverance of his people, changing his way and method of proceeding, as tender parents when they begin to relent towards their children with whom they have been displeased. Such are the tender mercies of our God, and so far is he from having any pleasure in the death of sinners.

VI. Things are now working towards their deliverance from the Ammonites' oppression, v. 17, 18. God had said, "I will deliver you no more;" but now they are not what they were, they are other men, they are new men, and now he will deliver them. That threatening was denounced to convince and humble them, and, now that it had taken

its desired effect, it is revoked in order to their deliverance. 1. The Ammonites are hardened to their own ruin. They gathered together in one body, that they might be destroyed at one blow, Rev. xvi. 16. 2. The Israelites are animated to their own rescue. They assembled likewise, v. 17. During their eighteen years' oppression, as in their former servitudes, they were run down by their enemies, because they would not incorporate; each family, city, or tribe, would stand by itself, and act independently, and so they all became an easy prey to the oppressors, for want of a due sense of a common interest to cement them: but, whenever they got together, they did well; so they did here. When God's Israel become as one man to advance a common good and oppose a common enemy what difficulty can stand before them? The people and princes of Gilead, having met, consult first about a general that should command in chief against the Ammonites. Hitherto most of the deliverers of Israel had an extraordinary call to the office, as Ehud, Barak, Gideon; but the next is to be called in a more common way, by a convention of the states, who enquired out a fit man to command their army, found out one admirably well qualified for the purpose, and God owned their choice by putting his Spirit upon him (*ch. xi. 29*); so that this instance is of use for direction and encouragement in after-ages, when extraordinary calls are no longer to be expected. Let such be impartially chosen to public trust and power as God has qualified, and then God will graciously own those who are thus chosen.

## CHAP. XI.

This chapter gives us the history of Jephthah, another of Israel's judges, and numbered among the worthies of the Old Testament, that by faith did great things (*Heb. xi. 32*), though he had not such an extraordinary call as the rest there mentioned had. Here we have, I. The disadvantages of his origin, *ver. 1-3*. II. The Gileadites' choice of him to be commander-in-chief against the Ammonites, and the terms he made with them, *ver. 4-11*. III. The treaty with the king of Ammon about the rights of the two nations, that the matter might be determined, if possible, without bloodshed, *ver. 12-28*. IV. His war with the Ammonites, which he enters upon with a solemn vow (*ver. 29-31*), prosecutes with bravery (*ver. 32*), and ends with a glorious victory, *ver. 33*. V. The straits he was brought into at his return to his own house by the vow he had made, *ver. 34-40*.

**N**OW Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

The princes and people of Gilead we left, in the close of the foregoing chapter, consulting about the choice of a general, having

come to this resolve, that whoever would undertake to lead their forces against the children of Ammon should by common consent be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. The enterprise was difficult, and it was fit that so great an encouragement as this should be proposed to him that would undertake it. Now all agreed that Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valour, and very fit for that purpose, none so fit as he, but he lay under three disadvantages:—

1. He was the son of a harlot (*v. 1*), of a strange woman (*v. 2*), one that was neither a wife nor a concubine; some think his mother was a Gentile; so Josephus, who calls him a stranger by the mother's side. An Ishmaelite, say the Jews. If his mother was a harlot, that was not his fault, however it was his disgrace. Men ought not to be reproached with any of the infelicities of their parentage or extraction, so long as they are endeavouring by their personal merits to roll away the reproach. The son of a harlot, if born again, born from above, shall be accepted of God, and be as welcome as any other to the glorious liberties of his children. Jephthah could not read in the law the brand there put on the Ammonites, the enemies he was to grapple with, that they should not enter into the congregation of the Lord, but in the same paragraph he met with that which looked black upon himself, that a bastard should be in like manner excluded, *Dent. xxiii. 2, 3*. But if that law means, as most probably it does, only those that are born of incest, not of fornication, he was not within the reach of it. 2. He had been driven from his country by his brethren. His father's legitimate children, insisting upon the rigour of the law, thrust him out from having any inheritance with them, without any consideration of his extraordinary qualifications, which merited a dispensation, and would have made him a mighty strength and ornament of their family, if they had overlooked his being illegitimate and admitted him to a child's part, *v. 2*. One would not have thought this abandoned youth was intended to be Israel's deliverer and judge, but God often humbles those whom he designs to exalt, and makes that stone the head of the corner which the builders refused; so Joseph, Moses, and David, the three most eminent of the shepherds of Israel, were all thrust out by men, before they were called of God to their great offices. 3. He had, in his exile, headed a rabble, *v. 3*. Being driven out by his brethren, his great soul would not suffer him either to dig or beg, but by his sword he must live; and, being soon noted for his bravery, those that were reduced to such straits, and animated by such a spirit, enlisted themselves under him. Vain men they are here called, that is, men that had run through their estates and had to seek for a livelihood. These went out with him, not to rob or plunder, but to hunt wild beasts,

and perhaps to make incursions upon those countries which Israel was entitled to, but had not as yet come to the possession of, or were some way or other injured by. This is the man that must save Israel. That people had by their idolatry made themselves children of whoredoms, and aliens from God and his covenant, and therefore, though God upon their repentance will deliver them, yet, to mortify them and remind them of their sin, he chooses to do it by a bastard and an exile.

4 And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. 5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: 6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. 7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? 8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. 9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? 10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. 11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

Here is, I. The distress which the children of Israel were in upon the Ammonites' invasion of their country, v. 4. Probably this was the same invasion with that mentioned, ch. x. 17, when the children of Ammon were gathered together and encamped in or against Gilead. And those words, in process of time, refer to what goes immediately before of the expulsion of Jephthah; many days after he had been thus thrust out in disgrace was he fetched back again with honour.

II. The court which the elders made to

Jephthah hereupon to come and help them. They did not write or send a messenger to him, but went themselves to fetch him, resolving to have no demal, and the exigence of the case was such as would admit no delay. Their errand to him was, *Come, and be our captain*, v. 6. They knew none among themselves that was able to undertake that great trust, but in effect confessed themselves unfit for it; they know him to be a bold man, and inured to the sword, and therefore he must be the man. See how God prepares men for the service he designs them for, and makes their troubles work for their advancement. If Jephthah had not been put to his shifts by his brethren's unkindness, he would not have had such occasion as this gave him to exercise and improve his martial genius, and so to signalize himself and become famous. *Out of the eater comes forth meat.* The children of Israel were assembled and encamped, ch. x. 17. But an army without a general is like a body without a head; therefore *Come, say they, and be our captain, that we may fight.* See the necessity of government; though they were hearty enough in the cause, yet they owned they could not fight without a captain to command them. So necessary is it to all societies that there be a *pars imperons* and a *pars subdito*, some to rule and others to obey, that any community would humbly beg the favour of being commanded rather than that every man should be his own master. Blessed be God for government, for a good government.

III. The objections Jephthah makes against accepting their offer: *Did you not hate me, and expel me?* v. 7. It should seem that his brethren were some of these elders, or these elders by suffering his brethren to abuse him, and not righting him as they ought to have done (for their business is to defend the poor and fatherless, Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4), had made themselves guilty of his expulsion, and he might justly charge them with it. Magistrates, that have power to protect those that are injured, if they neglect to redress their grievances are really guilty of inflicting them. "You hated me and expelled me, and therefore how can I believe that you are sincere in this proposal, and how can you expect that I should do you any service?" Not but that Jephthah was very willing to serve his country, but he thought fit to give them a hint of their former unkindness to him, that they might repent of their sin in using him so ill, and might for the future be the more sensible of their obligations. Thus Joseph humbled his brethren before he made himself known to them. The particular case between the Gileadites and Jephthah was a resemblance of the general state of the case between Israel and God at this time. They had thrust God out by their idolatries, yet in their distress begged his help; he told them how justly he might have rejected them, and yet graciously delivered them. So did Jephthah.



Many slight God and good men till they come to be in distress, and then they are desirous of God's mercy and good men's prayers.

IV. Their urgency with him to accept the government they offer him, v. 8. "Therefore because we formerly did thee that wrong, and to show thee that we repent of it and would gladly atone for it, we *turn again to thee now*, to put such an honour upon thee as shall balance that indignity." Let this instance be, 1. A caution to us not to despise or trample upon any because they are mean, nor to be injurious to any that we have advantage against, because, whatever we think of them now, the time may come when we may have need of them, and may be glad to be beholden to them. It is our wisdom to make no man our enemy, because we know not how soon our distresses may be such as that we may be highly concerned to make him our friend. 2. An encouragement to men of worth that are slighted or ill-treated. Let them bear it with meekness and cheerfulness, and leave it to God to make their light shine out of obscurity. Fuller's remark on this story, in his "Pisgah Sight," is this: "Virtue once in an age will work her own advancement, and, when such as hate it chance to need it, they will be forced to prefer it," and then the honour will appear the brighter.

V. The bargain he makes with them. He had mentioned the injuries they had formerly done him, but, perceiving their repentance, his spirit was too great and generous to mention them any more. God had forgiven Israel the affronts they had put upon him (ch. x. 16), and therefore Jephthah will forgive. Only he thinks it prudent to make his bargain wisely for the future, since he deals with men that he had reason to distrust. 1. He puts to them a fair question, v. 9. He speaks not with too much confidence of his success, knowing how justly God might suffer the Ammonites to prevail for the further punishment of Israel; but puts an *if* upon it. Nor does he speak with any confidence at all in himself; if he do succeed, it is *the Lord that delivers them into his hand*, intending hereby to remind his countrymen to look up to God, as arbitrator of the controversy and the giver of victory, for so he did. "Now if, by the blessing of God, I come home a conqueror, tell me plainly *shall I be your head?*" If I deliver you, under God, shall I, under him, reform you?" The same question is put to those who desire salvation by Christ. "If he save you, will you be willing that he shall rule you? for on no other terms will he save you. If he make you happy, shall he make you holy? If he be your helper, shall he be your head?" 2. They immediately give him a positive answer (v. 10): "We will *do according to thy words*; command us in war, and thou shalt command us in peace." They do not take time to consider of it. The case

was too plain to need a debate, and the necessity too pressing to admit a delay. They knew they had power to conclude a treaty for those whom they represented, and therefore bound it with an oath, *The Lord be witness between us*. They appeal to God's omniscience as the judge of their present sincerity, and to his justice as an avenger if afterwards they should prove false. *The Lord be a hearer*, so the word is. Whatever we speak, it concerns us to remember that God is a hearer, and to speak accordingly. Thus was the original contract ratified between Jephthah and the Gileadites, which all Israel, it should seem, agreed to afterwards, for it is said (ch. xii. 7), *he judged Israel*. He hereupon went with them (v. 11) to the place where they were all assembled (ch. x. 17), and there by common consent they *made him head and captain*, and so ratified the bargain their representatives had made with him, that he should be not only captain now, but head for life. Jephthah, to obtain this little honour, was willing to expose his life for them (ch. xii. 3), and shall we be discouraged in our Christian warfare by any of the difficulties we may meet with in it, when Christ himself has promised *a crown of life to him that overcometh?*

VI. Jephthah's pious acknowledgment of God in this great affair (v. 11): *He uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*, that is, upon his elevation, he immediately retired to his devotions, and in prayer spread the whole matter before God, both his choice to the office and his execution of the office, as one that had his eye ever towards the Lord, and would do nothing without him, that leaned not to his own understanding or courage, but depended on God and his favour. He utters before God all his thoughts and cares in this matter; for God gives us leave to be free with him. 1. "Lord, the people have made me their head; wilt thou confirm the choice, and own me as thy people's head under thee and for thee?" God justly complains of Israel (Hes. viii. 4), *they have set up kings, but not by me*. "Lord," said Jephthah, "I will be no head of their making without thee. I will not accept the government unless thou give me leave." Had Abimelech done this, he might have prospered. 2. "Lord, they have made me their captain, to go before them in this war with the Ammonites; shall I have thy presence? Wilt thou go before me? If not, carry me not up hence. Lord, satisfy me in the justice of the cause. Assure me of success in the enterprise." This is a rare example, to be imitated by all, particularly by great ones; in all our ways let us acknowledge God, seek his favour, ask counsel at his mouth, and take him along with us; so shall we make our way prosperous. Thus Jephthah opened the campaign with prayer. That was likely to end gloriously which began thus piously.

12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? 13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably. 14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: 15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: 16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; 17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken *thereto*. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. 18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. 19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. 20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. 22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. 23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the

Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? 24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. 25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, 26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover *them* within that time? 27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me. the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. 28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

We have here the treaty between Jephthah, now judge of Israel, and the king of the Ammonites (who is not named), that the controversy between the two nations might, if possible, be accommodated without the effusion of blood.

1. Jephthah, as one having authority, sent to the king of Ammon, who in this war was the aggressor, to demand his reasons for invading the land of Israel: "*Why hast thou come to fight against me in my land?*" r. 12. Had I come first into thy land to disturb thee in thy possession, this would have been reason enough for fighting against me, for how must force be repelled but by force? but what hast thou to do to come thus in a hostile manner into my land?" so he calls it, in the name both of God and Israel. Now this fair demand shows, 1. That Jephthah did not delight in war, though he was a mighty man of valour, but was willing to prevent it by a peaceable accommodation. If he could by reason persuade the invaders to retire, he would not compel them to do it by the sword. War should be the last remedy, not to be used till all other methods of ending matters in variance have been tried in vain, *ratio ultima regum—the last resource of kings*. This rule should be observed in going to law. The sword of justice, as well as the sword of war, must not be appealed to till the contending parties have first endeavoured by gentler means to understand one another, and to accommodate matters in variance, 1 Cor. vi. 1. 2. That Jephthah did delight in equity, and designed no other than

to do justice. If the children of Ammon could convince him that Israel had done them wrong, he was ready to restore the rights of the Ammonites. If not, it was plain by their invasion that they did Israel wrong, and he was ready to maintain the rights of the Israelites. A sense of justice should guide and govern us in all our undertakings.

II. The king of the Ammonites now gives in his demand, which he should have published before he had invaded Israel, *v. 13*. His pretence is, "Israel took away my lands long since; now therefore restore those lands." We have reason to think the Ammonites, when they made this descent upon Israel, meant no other than to spoil and plunder the country, and enrich themselves with the prey, as they had done formerly under Eglon (*ch. iii. 13*) when no such demand as this was made, though the matter was then fresh; but when Jephthah demanded the cause of their quarrel, and they could not for shame own what was their true intent and meaning, some old musty records were searched, or some ancient traditions enquired into, and from them this reason was drawn to serve the present turn, for a colourable pretence of equity in the invasion. Even those that do the greatest wrong yet have such a conviction in their consciences of justice that they would seem to do right. *Restore those lands.* See upon what uncertain terms we hold our worldly possessions; what we think we have the surest hold of may be challenged from us, and wrested out of our hands. Those that have got to the heavenly Canaan need not fear having their titles questioned.

III. Jephthah gives in a very full and satisfactory answer to this demand, showing it to be altogether unjust and unreasonable, and that the Ammonites had no title to this country that lay between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, now in the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad. As one very well versed in the history of his country, he shows,

1. That Israel never took any land away either from the Moabites or Ammonites. He puts them together because they were brethren, the children of Lot, near neighbours, and of united interests, having the same god, Chemosh, and perhaps sometimes the same king. The lands in question Israel took away, not from the Moabites or Ammonites (they had particular orders from God not to meddle with them nor any thing they had, *Deut. ii. 9, 19*, and religiously observed their orders), but they found them in the possession of Sihon king of the Amorites, and out of his hand they took them justly and honourably, as he will show afterwards. If the Amorites, before Israel came into that country, had taken these lands from the Moabites or Ammonites, as it should seem they had (*Num. xxi. 26; Josh. xiii. 25*), Israel was not concerned to enquire into

that or answer for it. If the Ammonites had lost these lands and their title to them, the children of Israel were under no obligation to recover the possession for them. Their business was to conquer for themselves, not for other people. This is his first plea, "Not guilty of the trespass."

2. That they were so far from invading the property of any other nations than the devoted posterity of cursed Canaan (one of the branches of which the Amorites were, *Gen. x. 16*) that they would not so much as force a passage through the country either of the Edomites, the seed of Esau, or of the Moabites, the seed of Lot; but even after a very tedious march through the wilderness, with which they were sadly tired (*v. 16*), when the king of Edom first, and afterwards the king of Moab, denied them the courtesy of a way through their country (*v. 17*), rather than give them any offence or annoyance, weary as they were, they put themselves to the further fatigue of compassing both the land of Edom and that of Moab, and came not within the border of either, *v. 18*. Note, Those that behave themselves inoffensively may take the comfort of it, and plead it against those that charge them with injustice and wrong doing. *Our righteousness will answer for us in time to come* (*Gen. xxx. 35*) and will *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, *1 Pet. ii. 15*.

3. That in that war in which they took this land out of the hands of Sihon king of the Amorites he was the aggressor, and not they, *v. 19, 20*. They sent a humble petition to him for leave to go through his land, willing to give him any security for their good behaviour in their march. "Let us pass (say they) unto our place, that is, to the land of Canaan, which is the only place we call ours, and to which we are pressing forward, not designing a settlement here." But Sihon not only denied them this courtesy, as Edom and Moab had done (had he only done so, who knows but Israel might have gone about some other way?) but he mustered all his forces, and fought against Israel (*v. 20*), not only shut them out of his own land, but would have cut them off from the face of the earth (*Num. xxi. 23, 24*), aimed at nothing less than their ruin, *v. 20*. Israel therefore, in their war with him, stood in their own just and necessary defence, and therefore, having routed his army, might justly, in further revenge of the injury, seize his country as forfeited. Thus Israel came to the possession of this country, and doubted not to make good their title to it; and it is very unreasonable for the Ammonites to question their title, for the Amorites were the inhabitants of that country, and it was purely their land and their coasts that the Israelites then made themselves masters of, *v. 21, 22*.

4. He pleads a grant from the crown, and claims under that, *v. 23, 24*. It was not

Israel (they were fatigued with their long march, and were not fit for action so soon), but it was the Lord God of Israel, who is King of nations, whose the earth is and the fulness thereof, he it was that dispossessed the Amorites and planted Israel in their room. God gave them the land by an express and particular conveyance, such as vested the title in them, which they might make good against all the world. Deut. ii. 24, *I have given into thy hand Sihon and his land*; he gave it to them, by giving them a complete victory over the present occupants, notwithstanding the great disadvantages they were under. "Can you think that God gave it to us in such an extraordinary manner with design that we should return it to the Moabites or Ammonites again? No, we put a higher value upon God's favours than to part with them so easily." To corroborate this plea, he urges an argument *ad hominem*—*directed to the man*: *Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee?* He not only appeals to the common resolutions of men to hold their own against all the world, but to the common religion of the nations, which, they thought, obliged them to make much of that which their gods gave them. Not that Jephthah thought Chemosh a god, only he is *thy god*, and the worshippers even of those dunghill deities that could do neither good nor evil yet thought themselves beholden to them for all they had (Hos. ii. 12, *These are my rewards which my lovers have given me*; and see Judg. xvi. 24) and made this a reason why they would hold it fast, that their gods gave it to them. "This thou thinkest a good title, and shall not we?" The Ammonites had dispossessed those that dwelt in their land before them; they thought they did it by the help of Chemosh their god, but really it was Jehovah the God of Israel that did it for them, as is expressly said, Deut. ii. 19, 21. "Now," says Jephthah, "we have as good a title to our country as you have to yours." Note, One instance of the honour and respect we owe to God, as our God, is rightly to possess that which he gives us to possess, receive it from him, use it for him, keep it for his sake, and part with it when he calls for it. He has given it to us to possess, not to enjoy. He himself only must be enjoyed.

5. He pleads prescription. (1.) Their title had not been disputed when they first entered upon it, r. 25. "Balak who was then king of Moab, from whom the greatest part of these lands had been taken by the Amorites, and who was most concerned and best able to oppose us, if he had had any thing to object against our settlement there, yet sat still, and never offered to strive against Israel." He knew that for his own part he had fairly lost it to the Amorites and was not able to recover it, and could not but acknowledge that Israel had fairly won it of the Amorites, and therefore all his care was to secure what was left: he never pretended a title to what

was lost. See Num. xxii. 2, 3. "He then acquiesced in God's way of disposing of kingdoms, and wilt not thou now?" (2.) Their possession had never yet been disturbed, r. 26. He pleads that they had kept this country as their own now about 300 years, and the Ammonites in all that time had never attempted to take it from them, no, not when they had it in their power to oppress them, *ch. iii. 13, 14*. So that, supposing their title had not been clear at the first (which yet he had proved it was), yet, no claim having been made for so many generations, the entry of the children of Ammon, without doubt, was barred for ever. A title so long unquestioned shall be presumed unquestionable.

6. By these arguments Jephthah justifies himself and his own cause ("I have not sinned against thee in taking or keeping what I have no right to; if I had, I would instantly make restitution"), and condemns the Ammonites: "*Thou doest me wrong to war against me, and must expect to speed accordingly*," r. 27. It seems to me an evidence that the children of Israel, in the days of their prosperity and power (for some such days they had in the times of the judges) had conducted themselves very inoffensively to all their neighbours and had not been vexatious or oppressing to them (either by way of reprisal or under colour of propagating their religion), that the king of the Ammonites, when he would seek an occasion of quarrelling with them, was forced to look 300 years back for a pretence. It becomes the people of God thus to be blameless and harmless, and without rebuke.

7. For the deciding of the controversy, he puts himself upon God and his sword, and the king of Ammon joins issue with him (r. 27, 28): *The Lord the Judge be judge this day*. With this solemn reference of the matter to the Judge of heaven and earth he designs either to deter the Ammonites from proceeding and oblige them to retire, when they saw the right of the cause was against them, or to justify himself in subduing them if they should go on. Note, War is an appeal to heaven, to God the Judge of all, to whom the issues of it belong. If doubtful rights be disputed, he is hereby requested to determine them. If manifest rights be invaded or denied, he is hereby applied to for the vindicating of what is just and the punishing of wrong. As the sword of justice was made for lawless and disobedient persons (1 Tim. i. 9), so was the sword of war made for lawless and disobedient princes and nations. In war therefore the eye must be ever up to God, and it must always be thought a dangerous thing to desire or expect that God should patronise unrighteousness.

Neither Jephthah's apology, nor his appeal, wrought upon the king of the children of Ammon; they had found the sweets of the spoil of Israel, in the eighteen years wherein they had oppressed them (*ch. x. 8*), and hoped now to make themselves masters of the tree

with the fruit of which they had so often enriched themselves. He hearkened not to the words of Jephthah, his heart being hardened to his destruction.

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over *unto* the children of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. 32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minneeth, *even* twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. 34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his nouse, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she *was his* only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. 36 And she said unto him, My father, *if* thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, *even* of the children of Ammon. 37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away *for* two months: and she

went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her *according* to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

We have here Jephthah triumphing in a glorious victory, but, as an alloy to his joy, troubled and distressed by an unadvised vow.

1. Jephthah's victory was clear, and shined very brightly, both to his honour and to the honour of God, his in pleading and God's in owning a righteous cause. 1. God gave him an excellent spirit, and he improved it bravely, *v.* 29. When it appeared by the people's unanimous choice of him for their leader that he had so clear a call to engage, and by the obstinate deafness of the king of Ammon to the proposals of accommodation that he had so just a cause to engage in, then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and very much advanced his natural faculties, enduing him with power from on high, and making him more bold and more wise than ever he had been, and more fired with a holy zeal against the enemies of his people. Hereby God confirmed him in his office, and assured him of success in his undertaking. Thus animated, he loses no time, but with an undaunted resolution takes the field. Particular notice is taken of the way by which he advanced towards the enemy's camp, probably because the choice of it was an instance of that extraordinary discretion with which the Spirit of the Lord had furnished him; for those who sincerely walk after the Spirit shall be led forth the right way. 2. God gave him eminent success, and he bravely improved that too (*v.* 32): *The Lord delivered the Ammonites into his hand*, and so gave judgment upon the appeal in favour of the righteous cause, and made those feel the force of war that would not yield to the force of reason; for he *sits in the throne, judging right*. Jephthah lost not the advantages given him, but pursued and completed his victory. Having routed their forces in the field, he pursued them to their cities, where he put to the sword all he found in arms, so as utterly to disable them from giving Israel any molestation, *v.* 33. But it does not appear that he utterly destroyed the people, as Joshua had destroyed the devoted nations, nor that he offered to make himself master of the country, though their pretensions to the land of Israel might have given him colour to do so: only he took care that they should be effectually subdued. Though others' attempting wrong to us will justify us in the

defence of our own right, yet it will not authorize us to do them wrong.

11. Jephthah's vow is dark, and much in the clouds. When he was going out from his own house upon this hazardous undertaking, in prayer to God for his presence with him he makes a secret but solemn vow or religious promise, to God, that, if God would graciously bring him back a conqueror, whosoever or whatsoever should first come out of his house to meet him it should be devoted to God, and offered up for a burnt-offering. At his return, tidings of his victory coming home before him, his own and only daughter meets him with the seasonable expressions of joy. This puts him into a great confusion; but there was no remedy: after she had taken some time to lament her own infelicity, she cheerfully submitted to the performance of his vow. Now,

1. There are several good lessons to be learnt out of this story. (1.) That there may be remainders of distrust and doubting even in the hearts of true and great believers. Jephthah had reason enough to be confident of success, especially when he found *the Spirit of the Lord come upon him*, and yet, now that it comes to the settling, he seems to hesitate (v. 30): *If thou wilt without fail deliver them into my hand, then I will do so and so.* And perhaps the snare into which his vow brought him was designed to correct the weakness of his faith, and a fond conceit he had that he could not promise himself a victory unless he proffered something considerable to be given to God in lieu of it. (2.) That yet it is very good, when we are in the pursuit or expectation of any mercy, to make vows to God of some instance of acceptable service to him, not as a purchase of the favour we desire, but as an expression of our gratitude to him and the deep sense we have of our obligations to render according to the benefit done to us. The matter of such a singular vow (Lev. xxvii. 2) must be something that has a plain and direct tendency either to the advancement of God's glory, and the interests of his kingdom among men, or to the furtherance of ourselves in his service, and in that which is antecedently our duty. (3.) That we have great need to be very cautious and well advised in the making of such vows, lest, by indulging a present emotion even of pious zeal, we entangle our own consciences, involve ourselves in perplexities, and are forced at last to say *before the angel that it was an error*, Eccl. v. 2—6. *It is a sware to a man hastily to devour that which is holy*, without due consideration *quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recusent—what we are able or unable to effect*, and without inserting the needful provisos and limitations which might prevent the entanglement, and then after vows to make the enquiry which should have been made before, Prov. xx. 25. Let Jephthah's harm be our warning in this matter. See Deut. xxiii. 22. (4.) That what

we have solemnly vowed to God we must conscientiously perform, if it be possible and lawful, though it be ever so difficult and grievous to us. Jephthah's sense of the powerful obligation of his vow must always be ours (v. 35): *"I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in a solemn vow, and I cannot go back,"* that is, "I cannot recel the vow myself, it is too late, nor can any power on earth dispense with it, or give me up my bond." The thing was my own, and in my own power (Acts v. 4), but now it is not. *Vow and pay*, Ps. lxxvi. 11. We deceive ourselves if we think to mock God. If we apply this to the consent we have solemnly given, in our sacramental vows, to the covenant of grace made with poor sinners in Christ, what a powerful argument will it be against the sins we have by those vows bound ourselves out from, what a strong inducement to the duties we have hereby bound ourselves up to, and what a ready answer to every temptation! *"I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot go back; I must therefore go forward. I have sworn, and I must, I will, perform it. Let me not dare to play fast and loose with God."* (5.) That it well becomes children obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord, and particularly to comply with their pious resolutions for the honour of God and the keeping up of religion in their families, though they be harsh and severe, as the Rechabites, who for many generations religiously observed the commands of Jonadab their father in forbearing wine, and Jephthah's daughter here, who, for the satisfying of her father's conscience, and for the honour of God and her country, yielded herself as one devoted (v. 36): *"Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; I know I am dear to thee, but am well content that God should be dearer."* The father might disallow any vow made by the daughter (Num. xxx. 5), but the daughter could not disallow or disannul, no, not such a vow as this, made by the father. This magnifies the law of the fifth commandment. (6.) That our friends' grievances should be our griefs. Where she went to bewail her hard fate the virgins, her companions, joined with her in her lamentations, r. 38. With those of her own sex and age she used to associate, who no doubt, now that her father had on a sudden grown so great, expected, shortly after his return, to dance at her wedding, but were heavily disappointed when they were called to retire to the mountains with her and share in her griefs. Those are unworthy the name of friends that will only rejoice with us, and not weep with us. (7.) That heroic zeal for the honour of God and Israel, though alloyed with infirmity and indiscretion, is worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. It well became the daughters of Israel by an annual solemnity to preserve the honourable memory of Jephthah's daughter, who made light even of her

own life like a noble heroine, when God had taken vengeance on Israel's enemies, *v. 36*. Such a rare instance of one that preferred the public interest before life itself was never to be forgotten. Her sex forbade her to follow to the war, and so to expose her life in battle, in lieu of which she hazards it much more (and perhaps apprehended that she did so, having some intimation of his vow, and did it designedly; for he tells her, *v. 35*, *Thou hast brought me very low*) to grace his triumphs. So transported was she with the victory as a common benefit that she was willing to be herself offered up as a thank-offering for it, and would think her life well bestowed when laid down on so great an occasion. She thinks it an honour to die, not as a sacrifice of atonement for the people's sins (that honour was reserved for Christ only), but as a sacrifice of acknowledgment for the people's mercies. (8.) From Jephthah's concern on this occasion, we must learn not to think it strange if the day of our triumphs in this world prove upon some account or other the day of our griefs, and therefore must always rejoice with trembling; we hope for a day of triumph hereafter which will have no alloy.

2. Yet there are some difficult questions that do arise upon this story which have very much employed the pens of learned men. I will say but little respecting them, because Mr. Poole has discussed them very fully in his English annotations.

(1.) It is hard to say what Jephthah did to his daughter in performance of his vow. [1.] Some think he only shut her up for a nun, and that it being unlawful, according to one part of his vow (for they make it disjunctive), to offer her up for a burnt-offering, he thus, according to the other part, engaged her to be the Lord's, that is, totally to sequester herself from all the affairs of this life, and consequently from marriage, and to employ herself wholly in the acts of devotion all her days. That which countenances this opinion is that she is said to bewail her virginity (*v. 37, 38*) and that she knew no man, *v. 39*. But, if he sacrificed her, it was proper enough for her to bewail, not her death, because that was intended to be for the honour of God, and she would undergo it cheerfully, but that unhappy circumstance of it which made it more grievous to her than any other, because she was her father's only child, in whom he hoped his name and family would be built up, that she was unmarried, and so left no issue to inherit her father's honour and estate; therefore it is particularly taken notice of (*v. 34*) that besides her he had neither son nor daughter. But that which makes me think Jephthah did not go about thus to satisfy his vow, or evade it rather, is that we do not find any law, usage, or custom, in all the Old Testament, which does in the least intimate that a single life was any branch or article of religion, or that any person, man or woman, was looked upon

as the more holy, more the Lord's, or devoted to him, for living unmarried: it was no part of the law either of the priests or of the Nazarites. Deborah and Huldah, both prophetesses, are both of them particularly recorded to have been married women. Besides, had she only been confined to a single life, she needed not to have desired these two months to bewail it in: she had her whole life before her to do that, if she saw cause. Nor needed she to take such a sad leave of her companions; for those that are of that opinion understand what is said in *v. 40* of their coming to talk with her, as our margin reads it, four days in a year. Therefore, [2.] It seems more probable that he offered her up for a sacrifice, according to the letter of his vow, misunderstanding that law which spoke of persons devoted by the curse of God as if it were to be applied to such as were devoted by men's vows (*Lev. xxvii. 29*, *None devoted shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death*), and wanting to be better informed of the power the law gave him in this case to redeem her. Abraham's attempt to offer up Isaac perhaps encouraged him, and made him think, if God would not accept this sacrifice which he had vowed, he would send an angel to stay his hand, as he did Abraham's. If she came out designedly to be made a sacrifice, as who knows but she might? perhaps he thought that would make the case the plainer. *Volenti non sit injuria*—No injury is done to a person by that to which he himself consents. He imagined, it may be, that where there was neither anger nor malice there was no murder, and that his good intention would sanctify this bad action; and, since he had made such a vow, he thought better to kill his daughter than break his vow, and let Providence bear the blame, that brought her forth to meet him.

(2.) But, supposing that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, the question is whether he did well. [1.] Some justify him in it, and think he did well, and as became one that preferred the honour of God before that which was dearest to him in this world. He is mentioned among the eminent believers who by faith did great things, *Heb. xi. 32*. And this was one of the great things he did. It was done deliberately, and upon two months' consideration and consultation. He is never blamed for it by any inspired writer. Though it highly exalts the paternal authority, yet it cannot justify any in doing the like. He was an extraordinary person. *The Spirit of the Lord came upon him*. Many circumstances, now unknown to us, might make this altogether extraordinary, and justify it, yet not so as that it might justify the like. Some learned men have made this sacrifice a figure of Christ the great sacrifice: he was of unspotted purity and innocency, as she a chaste virgin; he was devoted to death by his Father, and so made a curse, or an anathema, for us; he submitted himself, as she

did, to his Father's will: *Not as I will, but as thou wilt.* But, [2.] Most condemn Jephthah; he did ill to make so rash a vow, and worse to perform it. He could not be bound by his vow to that which God had forbidden by the letter of the sixth commandment: *Thou shalt not kill.* God had forbidden human sacrifices, so that it was (says Dr. Lightfoot) in effect a sacrifice to Moloch. And, probably, the reason why it is left dubious by the inspired penman whether he sacrificed her or no was that those who did afterwards offer their children might not take any encouragement from this instance. Concerning this and some other such passages in the sacred story, which learned men are in the dark, divided, and in doubt about, we need not much perplex ourselves; what is necessary to our salvation, thanks be to God, is plain enough.

#### CHAP. XII.

In this chapter we have, I. Jephthah's encounter with the Ephraimites, and the blood shed on that unhappy occasion (ver. 1-6), and the conclusion of Jephthah's life and government, ver. 7. II. A short account of three other of the judges of Israel: Iuzan (ver. 8-10), Elon (ver. 11, 12), Abdon, ver. 13-15.

AND the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire. 2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. 3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me? 4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites. 5 And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, *Art thou an Ephraimite?* If he said, *Nay;* 6 Then said they unto him, *Say now Shibboleth:* and he said *Sibboleth:* for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and

slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. 7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Here is, I. The unreasonable displeasure of the men of Ephraim against Jephthah, because he had not called them in to his assistance against the Ammonites, that they might share in the triumphs and spoils, v. 1. Pride was at the bottom of the quarrel. Only by that comes contention. Proud men think all the honours lost that go beside themselves, and then *who can stand before envy?* The Ephraimites had the same quarrel with Gideon (ch. viii. 1), who was of Manasseh on their side Jordan, as Jephthah was of Manasseh on the other side Jordan. Ephraim and Manasseh were nearer akin than any other of the tribes, being both the sons of Joseph, and yet they were more jealous one of another than any other of the tribes. Jacob having crossed hands, and given Ephraim the preference, looking as far forward as the kingdom of the ten tribes, which Ephraim was the head of, after the revolt from the house of David, that tribe, not content with that honour in the promise, was displeased if Manasseh had any honour done it in the mean time. It is a pity that kindred or relationship, which should be an inducement to love and peace, should be ever an occasion (as it often proves) of strife and discord. *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions among brethren are as the burs of a castle.* The anger of the Ephraimites at Jephthah was, 1. Causeless and unjust. *Why didst thou not call us to go with thee?* For a good reason. Because it was the men of Gilead that had made him their captain, not the men of Ephraim, so that he had no authority to call them. Had his attempt miscarried for want of their help, they might justly have blamed him for not desiring it. But when the work was done, and done effectually, the Ammonites being subdued and Israel delivered, there was no harm done, though their hands were not employed in it. 2. It was cruel and outrageous. They get together in a tumultuous manner, pass over Jordan as far as Mizpeh in Gilead, where Jephthah lived, and no less will satisfy their fury but they will burn his house and him in it. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce.* Those resentments that have the least reason for them have commonly the most rage in them. Jephthah was now a conqueror over the common enemies of Israel, and they should have come to congratulate him, and return him the thanks of their tribe for the good services he had done; but we must not think it strange if we receive ill from those from whom we deserve well. Jephthah was



now a mourner for the calamity of his family upon his daughter's account, and they should have come to condole with him and comfort him; but barbarous men take a pleasure in adding affliction to the afflicted. In this world, the end of one trouble often proves the beginning of another; nor must we ever *boast as though we had put off the harness.*

II. Jephthah's warm vindication of himself. He did not endeavour to pacify them, as Gideon had done in the like case; the Ephraimites were now more outrageous than they were then, and Jephthah had not so much of a meek and quiet spirit as Gideon had. Whether they would be pacified or no, Jephthah takes care,

1. To justify himself, v. 2, 3. He makes it out that they had no cause at all to quarrel with him, for, (1.) It was not in pursuit of glory that he had engaged in this war, but for the necessary defence of his country, with which the children of Ammon greatly strove. (2.) He had invited the Ephraimites to come and join with him, though he neither needed them nor was under any obligation to pay that respect to them, but they had declined the service: *I called you, and you delivered me not out of their hands.* Had that been true which they charged him with, yet it would not have been a just ground of quarrel; but it seems it was false, and, as the matter of fact now appears, he had more cause to quarrel with them for deserting the common interests of Israel in a time of need. It is no new thing for those who are themselves most culpable to be most clamorous in accusing the innocent. (3.) The enterprise was very hazardous, and they had more reason to pity him than to be angry with him: *I put my life in my hands*, that is, "exposed myself to the utmost peril in what I did, having so small an army." The honour they envied was bought dearly enough; they needed not to grudge it to him; few of them would have ventured so far for it. (4.) He does not take the glory of the success to himself (that would have been invidious), but gives it all to God: *"The Lord delivered them into my hands.* If God was pleased so far to make use of me for his glory, why should you be offended at that? Have you any reason to *fight against me?* Is not that in effect to fight against God, in whose hand I have been only an unworthy instrument?"

2. When this just answer (though not so soft an answer as Gideon's) did not prevail to turn away their wrath, he took care both to defend himself from their fury and to chastise their insolence with the sword, by virtue of his authority as Israel's judge. (1.) The Ephraimites had not only quarrelled with Jephthah, but, when his neighbours and friends appeared to take his part, they had abused them, and given them foul language; for I adhere to our translation, and so take it, v. 4. They said in scorn, "You Gileadites that dwell here on the other

side Jordan are but fugitives of Ephraim, the scum and dregs of the tribes of Joseph, of which Ephraim is the chief, the refuse of the family, and are so accounted among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites. Who cares for you? All your neighbours know what you are, no better than fugitives and vagabonds, separated from your brethren, and driven hither into a corner." The Gileadites were as true Israelites as any other, and at this time had signalized themselves, both in the choice of Jephthah and in the war with Ammon, above all the families of Israel, and yet are most basely and unjustly called *fugitives*. It is an ill thing to fasten names or characters of reproach upon persons or countries, as is common, especially upon those that lie under outward disadvantages: it often occasions quarrels that prove of ill consequence, as it did here. See likewise what a mischievous thing an abusive tongue is, that calls ill names, and gives scurrilous language: it *sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell* (Jam. iii. 6), and many a time cuts the throat of him that uses it, as it did here, Ps. lxxiv. 8. If these Ephraimites could have denied themselves the poor satisfaction of calling the Gileadites *fugitives*, they might have prevented a great deal of bloodshed; for *grievous words stir up anger*, and who knows how great a matter a little of that fire may kindle? (2.) This affront raises the Gileadites' blood, and the indignity done to themselves, as well as to their captain, must be revenged. [1.] They routed them in the field, v. 4. They fought with Ephraim, and, Ephraim being but a rude unheaded rabble, smote Ephraim, and put them to flight. [2.] They cut off their retreat, and so completed their revenge, v. 5, 6. The Gileadites, who perhaps were better acquainted with the passages of Jordan than the Ephraimites were, secured them with strong guards, who were ordered to slay every Ephraimite that offered to pass the river. Here was, *First*, Cruelty enough in the destruction of them. Sufficient surely was *the punishment which was inflicted by many*; when they were routed in the field, there needed not this severity to cut off all that escaped. Shall the sword devour for ever? Whether Jephthah is to be praised for this I know not; perhaps he saw it to be a piece of necessary justice. *Secondly*, Cunning enough in the discovery of them. It seems the Ephraimites, though they spoke the same language with other Israelites, yet had got a custom in the dialect of their country to pronounce the Hebrew letter *Shin* like *Samech*, and they had so strangely used themselves to it that they could not do otherwise, no, not to save their lives. We learn to speak by imitation, those that first used *s* for *sh*, did it either because it was shorter or because it was finer, and their children learnt to speak like them, so that you might know an Ephraimite by it;

as in England we know a west-country man or a north-country man, nay, perhaps a Shropshire man, and a Cheshire man, by his pronunciation. *Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech betrays thee.* By this the Ephraimites were discovered. If they took a man that they suspected to be an Ephraimite, but he denied it, they bade him say *Shibboleth*; but either he *could not*, as our translation reads it, or he did not heed, or frame, or direct himself, as some read, to pronounce it aright, but said *Sibboleth*, and so was known to be an Ephraimite, and was slain immediately. *Shibboleth* signifies a river or stream: "Ask leave to go over *Shibboleth*, the river." Those that were thus cut off made up the whole number of slaughtered Ephraimites forty-two thousand, *v. 6.* Thus another mutiny of that angry tribe was prevented.

3. Now let us observe the righteousness of God in the punishment of these proud and passionate Ephraimites, which in several instances answered to their sin. (1.) They were proud of the honour of their tribe, gloried in this, that they were Ephraimites; but how soon were they brought to be ashamed or afraid to own their country! *Art thou an Ephraimite?* No, now rather of any tribe than that. (2.) They had gone in a rage over Jordan to burn Jephthah's house with fire, but now they came back to Jordan as sneakingly as they had passed it furiously, and were cut off from ever returning to their own houses. (3.) They had upbraided the Gileadites with the infelicity of their country, lying at such a distance, and now they suffered by an infirmity peculiar to their own country, in not being able to pronounce *Shibboleth*. (4.) They had called the Gileadites, unjustly, fugitives, and now they really and in good earnest became fugitives themselves; and in the Hebrew the same word (*v. 5*) is used of the Ephraimites that escaped, or that fled, which they had used in scorn of the Gileadites, calling them *fugitives*. He that rolls the stone of reproach unjustly upon another, let him expect that it will justly return upon himself.

III. Here is the end of Jephthah's government. He judged Israel but six years, and then died, *v. 7.* Perhaps the death of his daughter sunk him so that he never looked up afterwards, but it shortened his days, and he went to his grave mourning.

8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. 9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. 10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Beth-lehem. 11 And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel;

and he judged Israel ten years. 12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. 13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. 14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. 15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

We have here a short account of the short reigns of three more of the judges of Israel, the first of whom governed but seven years, the second ten, and the third eight. *For the transgression of a land, many are the princes thereof*, many in a short time, successively (*Prov. xxviii. 2*), good men being removed in the beginning of their usefulness and by the time that they have applied themselves to their business.

I. Ibzan of Bethlehem, most probably Bethlehem of Judah, David's city, not that in Zebulun, which is only mentioned once, *Josh. xix. 15.* He ruled but seven years, but by the number of his children, and his disposing of them all in marriage himself, it appears that he lived long; and probably the great increase of his family, and the numerous alliances he made, added to his personal merits, made him the more fit to be either chosen by the people as Jephthah was, or called of God immediately, as Gideon was, to be Israel's judge, to keep up and carry on the work of God among them. That which is remarkable concerning him is, 1. That he had many children, sixty in all, a quiver full of these arrows. Thus was Bethlehem of old famous for increase, the very city where he was to be born whose spiritual seed should be *as the stars of heaven.* 2. That he had an equal number of each sex, thirty sons and thirty daughters, a thing which does not often happen in the same family, yet, in the great family of mankind, he that at first made two, male and female, by his wise providence preserves a succession of both in some sort of equality as far as is requisite to the keeping up of the generations of men upon earth. 3. That he took care to marry them all. His daughters he sent abroad, *et maritis dedit*, so the vulgar Latin adds—*he provided husbands for them*; and, as it were in exchange, and both ways, strengthening his interest, he took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. The Jews say, Every father owes three things to his son: to teach him to read the law, give him a trade, and get him a wife. What a difference was there between Ibzan's family and that of his immediate predecessor Jephthah! Ibzan has sixty children and all mar-

ried, Jephthah but one, a daughter, that dies or lives unmarried. Some are increased, others are diminished: both are the Lord's doing.

II. Elon of Zebulun, in the north of Canaan, was next raised up to preside in public affairs, to administer justice, and to reform abuses. Ten years he continued a blessing to Israel, and then died, v. 11, 12. Dr. Lightfoot computes that in the beginning of his time the forty years' oppression by the Philistines began (spoken of *ch.* xiii. 1), and about that time Samson was born. Probably, his residence being in the north, the Philistines who bordered upon the southern parts of Canaan took the opportunity of making incursions upon them.

III. Abdon, of the tribe of Ephraim, succeeded, and in him that illustrious tribe begins to recover its reputation, having not afforded any person of note since Joshua; for Abimelech the Shechemite was rather a scandal to it. This Abdon was famous for the multitude of his offspring (v. 14): he had forty sons and thirty grandsons, all of whom he lived to see grown up, and they rode on seventy ass-colts either as judges and officers or as gentlemen and persons of distinction. It was a satisfaction to him thus to see his children's children, but it is feared he did not see peace upon Israel, for by this time the Philistines had begun to break in upon them. Concerning this, and the rest of these judges that have ever so short an account given of them, yet notice is taken where they were buried (v. 7, 10, 12, 15), perhaps because the inscriptions upon their monuments (for such were anciently used, 2 Kings xxiii. 17) would serve for the confirmation and enlargement of their story, and might be consulted by such as desired further information concerning them. Peter, having occasion to speak of David, says, *His sepulchre is with us unto this day*, Acts ii. 29. Or it is intended for the honour of the places where they laid their bones, but may be improved for the lessening of our esteem of all worldly glory, of which death and the grave will stain the pride. These judges, that were as gods to Israel, died like men, and all their honour was laid in the dust.

It is very strange that in the history of all these judges, some of whose actions are very particularly related, there is not so much as once mention made of the high priest, or any other priest or Levite, appearing either for counsel or action in any public affair, from Phinehas (Judg. xx. 28) to Eli, which may well be computed 250 years; only the names of the high priests at that time are preserved, 1 Chron. vi. 4—7; and Ezra vii. 3—5. How can this strange obscurity of that priesthood for so long a time, now in the beginning of its days, agree with that mighty splendour with which it was introduced and the figure which the institution of it makes in the law of Moses? Surely it intimates

that the institution was chiefly intended to be typical, and that the great benefits that seemed to be promised by it were to be chiefly looked for in its antitype, the everlasting priesthood of our Lord Jesus, in comparison of the superior glory of which that priesthood had no glory, 2 Cor. iii. 10.

## CHAP. XIII.

At this chapter begins the story of Samson, the last of the judges of Israel whose story is recorded in this book, and next before Eli. The passages related concerning him are, from first to last, very surprising and uncommon. The figure he makes in this history is really great, and yet vastly different from that of his predecessors. We never find him at the head either of a court or of an army, never upon the throne of judgment nor in the field of battle, yet, in his own proper person, a great patriot of his country, and a terrible scourge and check to its enemies and oppressors; he was an eminent believer (Heb. xi. 32) and a glorious type of him who with his own arm wrought salvation. The history of the rest of the judges commences with their advancement to that station, but Samson's begins with his birth, nay, with his conception, and no less than an angel from heaven ushers him into the world, as a pattern of what should be afterwards done to John Baptist and to Christ. This is related in this chapter, 1. The occasion of raising up this deliverer was the oppression of Israel by the Philistines, ver. 1. 11. His birth is foretold by an angel to his mother, ver. 2—5. III. She relates the prediction to his father, ver. 6, 7. IV. They both together have it again from the angel (ver. 8—14), whom they treat with respect (ver. 15—18), and who, to their great amazement, discovers his dignity at parting, ver. 19—23. V. Samson is born, ver. 24, 25.

**A**ND the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. 2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. 3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. 4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: 5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. 6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: 7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

The first verse gives us a short account,

such as we have too often met with already, of the great distress that Israel was in, which gave occasion for the raising up of a deliverer. They did evil, as they had done, *in the sight of the Lord*, and then God delivered them, as he had done, into the hands of their enemies. If there had been no sin, there would have needed no Saviour; but sin was suffered to abound, that grace might much more abound. The enemies God now sold them to were the Philistines, their next neighbours, that lay among them, the first and chief of the nations which were devoted to destruction, but which God *left to prove them* (ch. iii. 1, 3), *the five lords of the Philistines*, an inconsiderable people in comparison with Israel (they had but five cities of any note), and yet, when God made use of them as the staff in his hand, they were very oppressive and vexatious. And this trouble lasted longer than any yet: it continued forty years, though probably not always alike violent. When Israel was in this distress Samson was born; and here we have his birth foretold by an angel. Observe,

I. His extraction. He was of the tribe of Dan, v. 2. *Dan* signifies a *judge* or *judgment*, Gen. xxx. 6. And probably it was with an eye to Samson that dying Jacob foretold, *Dan shall judge his people*, that is, "he shall produce a judge for his people, though one of the sons of the handmaids, as one, as well as any one, of the tribes of Israel," Gen. xlix. 16. The lot of the tribe of Dan lay next to the country of the Philistines, and therefore one of that tribe was most fit to be made a bridle upon them. His parents had been long childless. Many eminent persons were born of mothers that had been kept a great while in the want of the blessing of children, as Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and John Baptist, that the mercy might be the more acceptable when it did come. *Sing, O barren! thou that didst not bear*, Isa. liv. 1. Note, Mercies long waited for often prove signal mercies, and it is made to appear that they were worth waiting for, and by them others may be encouraged to continue their hope in God's mercy.

II. The glad tidings brought to his mother, that she should have a son. The messenger was an *angel of the Lord* (v. 3), yet appearing as a man, with the aspect and garb of a prophet, or man of God. And this angel (as the learned bishop Patrick supposes, on v. 18) was the Lord himself, that is, the *Word of the Lord*, who was to be the Messiah, for his name is called *Wonderful*, v. 18, and *Jehovah*, v. 19. The great Redeemer did in a particular manner concern himself about this typical redeemer. It was not so much for the sake of Manoah and his wife, obscure Danites, that this extraordinary message was sent, but for Israel's sake, whose deliverer he was to be, and not only so (his services to Israel not seeming to answer to the grandeur of his entry) but for

the Messiah's sake, whose type he was to be, and whose birth must be foretold by an angel, as his was. The angel, in the message he delivers, 1. Takes notice of her affliction: *Behold now, thou art barren and bearest not*. Hence she might gather he was a prophet, that though a stranger to her, and one she had never seen before, yet he knew this to be her grievance. He tells her of it, not to upbraid her with it, but because perhaps at this time she was actually thinking of this affliction and bemoaning herself as one written childless. God often sends in comfort to his people very seasonably, when they feel most from their troubles. "*Now thou art barren, but thou shalt not be always so,*" as she feared, "*nor long so.*" 2. He assures her that she should *conceive and bear a son* (v. 3) and repeats the assurance, v. 5. To show the power of a divine word, the strongest man that ever was was a child of promise, as Isaac, born by force and virtue of a promise, and faith in that promise, Heb. xi. 11; Gal. iv. 23. Many a woman, after having been long barren, has borne a son by providence, but Samson was by promise, because a figure of the promised seed, so long expected by the faith of the Old-Testament saints. 3. He appoints that the child should be a Nazarite from his birth, and therefore that the mother should be subject to the law of the Nazarites (though not under the vow of a Nazarite) and should *drink no wine or strong drink* so long as this child was to have its nourishment from her, either in the womb or at the breast, v. 4, 5. Observe, This deliverer of Israel must be in the strictest manner devoted to God and an example of holiness. It is spoken of as a kindness to the people that God raised up of their young men for Nazarites, Amos ii. 11. Other judges had corrected their apostasies from God, but Samson must appear as one, more than any of them, consecrated to God; and, notwithstanding what we read of his faults, we have reason to think that being a Nazarite of God's making he did, in the course of his conversation, exemplify, not only the ceremony, but the substance of that *separation to the Lord* in which the Nazariteship did consist, Num. vi. 2. Those that would save others must by singular piety distinguish themselves. Samuel, who carried on Israel's deliverance from the Philistines, was a Nazarite by his mother's vow (1 Sam. i. 11), as Samson by the divine appointment. The mother of this deliverer must therefore deny herself, and not eat any unclean thing; what was lawful at another time was now to be forborne. As the promise tried her faith, so this precept tried her obedience; for God requires both from those on whom he will bestow his favours. Women with child ought conscientiously to avoid whatever they have reason to think will be any way prejudicial to the health or good constitution of the fruit of their body.

And perhaps Samson's mother was to refrain from wine and strong drink, not only because he was designed for a Nazarite, but because he was designed for a man of great strength, which his mother's temperance would contribute to. 4. He foretels the service which this child should do to his country: *He shall begin to deliver Israel.* Note, It is very desirable that our children may be not only devoted entirely to God themselves, but instrumental for the good of others, and the service of their generation—not recluses, candles under a bushel, but on a candlestick. Observe, *He shall begin to deliver Israel.* This intimated that the oppression of the Philistines should last long, for Israel's deliverance from it should not so much as begin, not one step be taken towards it, till this child, who was now unborn, should have grown up to a capacity of beginning it. And yet he must not complete the deliverance: he shall only *begin to deliver Israel.* which intimates that the trouble should still be prolonged. God chooses to carry on his work gradually and by several hands. One lays the foundation of a good work, another builds, and perhaps a third brings forth the top stone. Now herein Samson was a type of Christ, (1.) As a Nazarite to God, a Nazarite from the womb. For, though our Lord Jesus was not a Nazarite himself, yet he was typified by the Nazarites, as being perfectly pure from all sin, not so much as conceived in it, and entirely devoted to his Father's honour. Of the Jewish church, as concerning the *flesh*, Christ came, because to them pertained the promise of him, Rom. ix. 4, 5. By virtue of that promise, he long lay as it were in the womb of that church, which for many ages was pregnant of him, and therefore, like Samson's mother, during that pregnancy was made a holy nation and a peculiar people, and strictly forbidden to *touch any unclean thing for his sake*, who in the fulness of time was to come from them. (2.) As a deliverer of Israel; for he is Jesus a Saviour, who saves his people from their sins. But with this difference: Samson did only begin to deliver Israel (David was afterwards raised up to complete the destruction of the Philistines), but our Lord Jesus is both Samson and David too, both the *author and finisher of our faith.*

III. The report which Manoah's wife, in a transport of joy, brings in all haste to her husband, of this surprising message *v. 6, 7.* The glad tidings were brought her when she was alone, perhaps religiously employed in meditation or prayer; but she could not, she would not, conceal them from her husband, but gives him an account, 1. Of the messenger. It was a man of God, *v. 6.* His countenance she could describe; it was very awful: he had such a majesty in his looks, such a sparkling eye, such a shining face, so powerfully commanding reverence and respect, that according to the idea she had of an angel he had the very countenance of

one. But his name she can give no account of, nor to what tribe or city of Israel he belonged, for he did not think fit to tell her, and, for her part, the very sight of him struck such an awe upon her that she durst not ask him. She was abundantly satisfied that he was a servant of God; his person and message she thought carried their own evidence along with them, and she enquired no further. 2. Of the message. She gives him a particular account both of the promise and of the precept (*v. 7.*), that he also might believe the promise and might on all occasions be a monitor to her to observe the precept. Thus should yoke-fellows communicate to each other their experiences of communion with God, and their improvements in acquaintance with him, that they may be helpful to each other in *the way that is called holy.*

8 Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. 9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband *was* not with her. 10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the *other* day. 11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, *Art* thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, *I am.* 12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and *how* shall we do unto him? 13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 14 She may not eat of any *thing* that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean *thing*: all that I commanded her let her observe.

We have here an account of a second visit which the angel of God made to Manoah and his wife.

I. Manoah earnestly prayed for it, *v. 8.* He was not incredulous of the story his wife told him; he knew she was a virtuous woman, and therefore the *heart of her husband did safely trust in her*; he knew she would not go about to impose upon him, much less

was he, as Josephus unworthily represents him, jealous of his wife's conversation with this stranger; but, 1. He takes it for granted that this child of promise shall in due time be given them, and speaks without hesitation of *the child that shall be born*. There was *not found so great faith*, no, not in Zechariah, a priest, then in waiting at the altar of the Lord, and to whom the angel himself appeared, as was in this honest Danite. Things hidden from the wise and prudent, who value themselves upon the niceness of their enquiries, are often revealed unto babes, who know how to prize God's gifts and to take God's word. *Blessed are those that have not seen and yet, as Manoah here, have believed*. 2. All his care is *what they should do to the child that should be born*. Note, Good men are more solicitous and desirous to know the duty that is to be done by them than to know the events that shall occur concerning them; for duty is ours, events are God's. Solomon enquires concerning the good men should *do*, not the good they should *have*, Eccl. ii. 3. 3. He therefore prays to God to send the same blessed messenger again, to give them further instructions concerning the management of this Nazarite, fearing lest his wife's joy for the promise might have made her forget some part of the precept, in which he was desirous to be fully informed, and lie under no mistake: "*Lord, let the man of God come again unto us, for we desire to be better acquainted with him.*" Note, Those that have heard from heaven cannot but wish to hear more thence, again and again to meet with the man of God. Observe, He does not go or send his servants abroad, to find out this man of God, but seeks him upon his knees, prays to God to send him, and, thus seeking, finds him. Would we have God's messengers, the ministers of his gospel, to bring a word proper for us, and for our instruction? *Entreat the Lord to send them to us, to teach us*, Rom. xv. 30, 32.

II. God graciously granted it: *God hearkened to the voice of Manoah*, v. 9. Note, God will not fail some way or other to guide those by his counsel that are sincerely desirous to know their duty, and apply themselves to him to teach them, Psal. xxv. 8, 9.

1. The angel appears the second time also to the wife, when she is sitting alone, probably tending the flocks, or otherwise well employed in the field where she has retired. Solitude is often a good opportunity of communion with God; good people have thought themselves never less alone than when alone, if God be with them.

2. She goes in all haste to call her husband, doubtless humbly beseeching the stay of this blessed messenger till she should return and her husband with her, v. 10, 11. She did not desire him to go with her to her husband, but would fetch her husband to him. Those that would meet with God must at-

tend where he is pleased to manifest himself. "Oh," says she, overjoyed, "my dear love, thy prayers are answered — yonder is the man of God, come to make us another visit — he that came the other day," or, as some read it, *this day*, for *other* is not in the original, and it is probable enough that both these visits were on the same day, and at the same place, and that the second time she sat expecting him. The man of God is very willing she should call her husband, John iv. 16. Those that have an acquaintance with the things of God themselves should invite others to the same acquaintance, John i. 45, 46. Manoah is not disgusted that the angel did not this second time appear to him, but very willingly goes after his wife to the man of God. To atone (as it were) for the first fatal miscarriage, when Eve earnestly pressed Adam to that which was evil, and he too easily yielded to her, let yoke-fellows excite one another to love and good works; and, if the wife will lead, let not the husband think it any disparagement to him to follow her in that which is virtuous and praiseworthy.

3. Manoah having come to the angel, and being satisfied by him that he was the same that had appeared to his wife, does, with all humility, (1.) Welcome the promise (r. 12). *Now let thy words come to pass*; this was the language, not only of his desire, but of his faith, like that of the blessed Virgin, Luke i. 38. "*Be it according to thy word.*" Lord, I lay hold on what thou hast said, and depend upon it; *let it come to pass.*" (2.) Beg that the prescriptions given might be repeated: *How shall we order the child?* The directions were given to his wife, but he looks upon himself as concerned to assist her in the careful management of this promised seed, according to order; for the utmost care of both the parents, and their constant joint endeavour, are little enough to be engaged for the good ordering of children that are devoted to God and to be brought up for him. Let not one devolve it on the other, but both do their best. Observe from Manoah's enquiry, [1.] In general, that, when God is pleased to bestow any mercy upon us, our great care must be how to use it well, and as we ought, because it is then only a mercy indeed when it is rightly managed. God has given us bodies, souls, estates; how shall we order them, that we may answer the intent of the donor, and give a good account of them? [2.] In particular, those to whom God has given children must be very careful how they order them, and what they do unto them, that they may drive out the foolishness that is *bound up in their hearts*, form their minds and manners well betimes, and *train them in the way wherein they should go*. Herein pious parents will beg divine assistance. "Lord, teach us how we may order our children, that they may be Nazarites, and living sacrifices to thee."

4. The angel repeats the directions he had before given (v. 13, 14): *Of all that I forbid let her beware; and all that I commanded her let her observe.* Note, There is need of a good deal both of caution and observation, for the right ordering both of ourselves and of our children. Beware and observe; take heed not only of drinking wine or strong drink, but of eating any thing that cometh of the vine. Those that would preserve themselves pure must keep at a distance from that which borders upon sin or leads to it. When she was with child of a Nazarite, she must not eat any unclean thing; so those in whom Christ is formed must carefully cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and do nothing to the prejudice of that new man.

15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. 16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. 17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? 18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? 19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. 21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. 23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.

We have here an account,

I. Of what further passed between Manoah and the angel at this interview. It was in kindness to him that while the angel was with him it was concealed from him that he was an angel; for, had he known it, it would have been such a terror to him that he durst not have conversed with him as he did (v. 16): *He knew not that he was an angel.* So Christ was in the world, and the world knew him not. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.* We could not bear the sight of the divine glory unveiled. God having determined to speak to us by men like ourselves, prophets and ministers, even when he spoke by his angels, or by his Son, they appeared in the likeness of men, and were taken but for men of God. Now,

1. The angel declined to accept his treat, and appointed him to turn it into a sacrifice. Manoah, being desirous to show some token of respect and gratitude to this venerable stranger who had brought them these glad tidings, begged he would take some refreshment with him (v. 15): We will soon make ready a kid for thee. Those that welcome the message will be kind to the messengers for his sake that sends them, 1 Thess. v. 13. But the angel told him (v. 16) he would not eat of his bread, any more than he would of Gideon's, but, as there, directed him to offer it to God, ch. vi. 20, 21. Angels need not meat nor drink; but the glorifying of God is their meat and drink, and it was Christ's, John iv. 34. And we in some measure do the will of God as they do it if, though we cannot live without meat and drink, yet we eat and drink to the glory of God, and so turn even our common meals into sacrifices.

2. The angel declined telling him his name, and would not so far gratify his curiosity. Manoah desired to know his name (v. 17), and of what tribe he was, not as if he doubted the truth of his message, but that they might return his visit, and be better acquainted with him (it is good to increase and improve our acquaintance with good men and good ministers); and he has a further design: *That when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honour, celebrate thee as a true prophet, and recommend others to thee for divine instructions,—that we may call the child that shall be born after thy name, and so do thee honour,—or that we may send thee a present, honouring one whom God has honoured.* But the angel denies his request with something of a check to his curiosity (v. 18): *Why askest thou thus after my name?* Jacob himself could not prevail for this favour, Gen. xxxii. 29. Note, We have not what we ask when we ask we know not what. Manoah's request was honestly meant and yet was denied. God told Moses his name (Exod. iii 13, 14), because there was a particular occasion for his knowing it but here there was no occasion. What Manoah asked for instruction in his duty he

was readily told (v. 12, 13), but what he asked to gratify his curiosity was denied. God has in his word given us full directions concerning our duty, but never designed to answer all the enquiries of a speculative head. He gives him a reason for his refusal: *It is secret*. The names of angels were not as yet revealed, to prevent the idolizing of them. After the captivity, when the church was cured of idolatry, angels made themselves known to Daniel by their names, Michael and Gabriel; and to Zacharias the angel told his name unasked (Luke i. 19): *I am Gabriel*. But here it is *secret*, or it is *wonderful*, too wonderful for us. One of Christ's names is *Wonderful*, Isa. ix. 6. His name was long a secret, but by the gospel it is brought to light: *Jesus a Saviour*. Manoah must not ask because he must not know. Note, (1.) There are secret things which belong not to us, and which we must content ourselves to be in the dark about while we are here in this world. (2.) We must therefore never indulge a vain curiosity in our enquiries concerning these things, Col. ii. 18. *Nescire velle quæ Magister maximus docere non vult erudita inscitia est—To be willingly ignorant of those things which our great Master refuses to teach us is to be at once ignorant and wise.*

3. The angel assisted and owned their sacrifice, and, at parting, gave them to understand who he was. He had directed them to offer their burnt-offering to the Lord, v. 16. Praises offered up to God are the most acceptable entertainment of the angels; see Rev. xxii. 9, *worship God*. And Manoah, having so good a warrant, though he was no priest and had no altar, turned his meat into a meat offering, and *offered it upon a rock to the Lord* (v. 19), that is, he brought and laid it to be offered. "Lord, here it is, do what thou pleasest with it." Thus we must bring our hearts to God as living sacrifices, and submit them to the operation of his Spirit. All things being now ready, (1.) *The angel did wondrously*, for his name was *Wonderful*. Probably the wonder he did was the same with what he had done for Gideon, he made fire to come either down from heaven or up out of the rock to consume the sacrifice. (2.) He ascended up towards heaven *in the flame of the sacrifice*, v. 20. By this it appeared that he was not, as they thought, a mere man, but a messenger immediately from heaven. Thence certainly he descended, for thither he ascended, John iii. 13; vi. 62. This signified God's acceptance of the offering and intimates to what we owe the acceptance of all our offerings, even to the mediation of the angel of the covenant, that other angel, who puts *much incense to the prayers of saints and so offers them before the throne*, Rev. viii. 3. Prayer is the ascent of the soul to God. But it is Christ in the heart by faith that makes it an offering of a sweet-smelling savour: without him our

services are offensive smoke, but, in him, acceptable flame. We may apply it to Christ's sacrifice of himself for us; he ascended in the flame of his own offering, for *by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place*, Heb. ix. 12. While the angel did this, it is twice said (v. 19, 20) *that Manoah and his wife looked on*. This is a proof of the miracle: the matter of fact was true, for out of the mouth of these two eye-witnesses the report of it is established. The angel did all that was done in the sacrifice; they did but look on; yet doubtless, when the angel ascended towards heaven, their hearts ascended with him in thanksgiving for the promise which came thence and in expectation of the performance to come thence too. Yet, when the angel has ascended, they dared not, as those that were the witnesses of Christ's ascension, stand gazing up into heaven, but in holy fear and reverence they fell on their faces to the ground. And now, [1.] *They knew that it was an angel*, v. 21. It was plain it was not the body of a man they saw, since it was not chained to the earth, nor prejudiced by fire; but ascended, and ascended in flame, and therefore with good reason they conclude it was an angel; for *he maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire*. [2.] But he did not any more appear to them; it was for a particular occasion, now over, that he was sent, not to settle a constant correspondence, as with prophets. They must remember and observe what the angel had said and not expect to hear more.

II. We have an account of the impressions which this vision made upon Manoah and his wife. While the angel did wondrously, they looked on, and said nothing (so it becomes us carefully to observe the wondrous works of God, and to be silent before him); but when he had gone, having finished his work, they had time to make their reflections. 1. In Manoah's reflection upon it there is *great fear*, v. 22. He had spoken with great assurance of the son they should shortly be the joyful parents of (v. 8, 12), and yet is now put into such a confusion by that very thing which should have strengthened and encouraged his faith that he counts upon nothing but their being both cut off immediately: *We shall surely die*. It was a vulgar opinion generally received among the ancient Jews that it was present death to see God or an angel; and this notion quite overcome his faith for the present, as it did Gideon's, ch. vi. 22. 2. In his wife's reflection upon it there is *great faith*, v. 23. Here the weaker vessel was the stronger believer, which perhaps was the reason why the angel chose once and again to appear to her. Manoah's heart began to fail him, but his wife, as a help meet for him, encouraged him. Two are better than one, for, if one fall into dejections and despondencies, the other will help to raise him up. Yoke-fellows should piously assist each



other's faith and joy as there is occasion. None could argue better than Manoah's wife does here: *We shall surely die*, said her husband; "Nay," said she, "we need not fear that; let us never turn that against us which is really for us. We shall not die unless God be pleased to kill us: our death must come from his hand and his pleasure. Now the tokens of his favour which we have received forbid us to think that he designs our destruction. Had he thought fit to kill us, (1.) He would not have accepted our sacrifice, and signified to us his acceptance of it by *turning it to ashes*, Ps. xx. 3, *margin*. The sacrifice was the ransom of our lives, and the fire fastening upon that was a plain indication of the turning away of his wrath from us. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, but you see ours is not so. (2.) He would not have shown us all these things, these strange sights, now at a time when there is little or no open vision (1 Sam. iii. 1), nor would he have given these exceedingly great and precious promises of a son that shall be a Nazarite and a deliverer of Israel—he would not have told us such things as these if he had been pleased to kill us. We need not fear the withering of those roots out of which such a branch is yet to spring." Note, Hereby it appears that God designs not the death of sinners that he has accepted the great sacrifice which Christ offered up for their salvation, has put them in a way of obtaining his favour, and has assured them of it upon their repentance. Had he been pleased to kill them, he would not have done so. And let those good Christians who have had communion with God in the word and prayer, to whom he has graciously manifested himself, and who have had reason to think God has accepted their works, take encouragement thence in a cloudy and dark day. "God would not have done what he has done for my soul if he had designed to forsake me, and leave me to perish at last; for his work is perfect, nor will he mock his people with his favours." Learn to reason as Manoah's wife did, "If God had designed me to perish under his wrath, he would not have given me such distinguishing tokens of his favour." *O woman! great is thy faith.*

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Here is, 1. Samson's birth. The woman that had been long barren bore a son, according to the promise; for no word of God shall fall to the ground. Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? 2. His name, *Samson*, has been derived by some, from

*Shemesh, the sun*, turned into a diminutive, *so exiguus—the sun in miniature*, perhaps because, being born like Moses to be a deliverer, he was like him exceedingly fair, his face shone like a little sun; or his parents so named him in remembrance of the shining countenance of that man of God who brought them the notice of him; though they knew not his name, yet thus, now that his sayings had come to pass, they did him honour. A little sun, because a Nazarite born (for the Nazarites were as *rubies and sapphires* (Lam. iv. 7), and because of his great strength. The sun is compared to a *strong man* (Ps. xix. 5), why should not a strong man then be compared to the sun when he goes forth in his strength? A little sun, because the glory of, and a light to, his people Israel, a type of Christ, the Sun of righteousness. 3 His childhood. He grew more than is usual in strength and stature, far out-grew other children of his age; and not in that only, but in other instances, it appeared that the Lord blessed him, qualified him, both in body and mind, for something great and extraordinary. Children of promise shall have the blessing. 4 His youth. When he grew up a little *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him*, v. 25. This was an evidence that the Lord blessed him. Where God gives his blessing he gives his Spirit to qualify for the blessing. Those are blessed indeed in whom the Spirit of grace begins to work betimes, in the days of their childhood. If the *Spirit be poured out upon our offspring*, they will spring up as *willows by the water courses*, Isa. xlv. 3, 4. The Spirit of God moved Samson in the camp of Dan, that is, in the general muster of the trained bands of that tribe, who probably had formed a camp between Zorah and Eshtaol, near the place where he lived, to oppose the incursions of the Philistines; there Samson, when a child, appeared among them, and signalized himself by some very brave actions, excelling them all in manly exercises and trials of strength: and probably he showed himself more than ordinarily zealous against the enemies of his country, and discovered more of a public spirit than could be expected in a child. The Spirit moved him *at times*, not at all times, but as the wind blows, when he listed, to show that what he did was not from himself, for then he could have done it at any time. Strong men think themselves greatly animated by wine (Ps. lxxviii. 65), but Samson drank no wine, and yet excelled in strength and courage, and every thing that was bold and brave, for he had the Spirit of God moving him: therefore *be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit*, who will come to those that are sober and temperate.

## CHAP. XIV.

The idea which this chapter gives us of Samson is not what one might have expected concerning one who, by the special designation of heaven, was a Nazarite to God and a deliverer of Israel; and yet really he was both. Here is, 1. Samson's courtship of a daughter of the Philistines, and his marriage to her, ver. 1–5, 7, 8. 11. His conquest of a lion, and the prize he found in the

carcase of it, ver. 5, 6, 8, 9. III. Samson's riddle proposed to his companions (ver. 10—13) and unriddled by the treachery of his wife, ver. 13—15. IV. The occasion this gave him to kill thirty of the Philistines (ver. 19) and to break off his new alliance, ver. 20.

AND Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. 3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, *Is there* never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. 4 But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. 5 Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. 6 And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and *he had* nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done. 7 And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8 And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, *there was* a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. 9 And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Here, I. Samson, under the extraordinary guidance of Providence, seeks an occasion of quarrelling with the Philistines, by joining in affinity with them—a strange method, but the truth is Samson was himself a riddle, a paradox of a man, did that which was really great and good, by that which was seemingly weak and evil, because he was designed not to be a pattern to us (who must walk by rule,

not by example), but a type of him who, though he knew no sin, was made sin for us, and appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh that he might condemn and destroy sin in the flesh, Rom. viii. 3.

1. As the negociation of Samson's marriage was a common case, we may observe, (1.) That it was weakly and foolishly done of him to set his affections upon a daughter of the Philistines; the thing appeared very improper. Shall one that is not only an Israelite, but a Nazarite, devoted to the Lord, covet to become one with a worshipper of Dagon? Shall one marked for a patriot of his country match among those that are its sworn enemies? He saw this woman (v. 1), and she *pleased him well*, v. 3. It does not appear that he had any reason to think her wise or virtuous, or in any way likely to be a help-meat for him; but he saw something in her face that was very agreeable to his fancy, and therefore nothing will serve but she must be his wife. He that in the choice of a wife is guided only by his eye, and governed by his fancy, must afterwards thank himself if he find a Philistine in his arms. (2.) Yet it was wisely and well done not to proceed so much as to make his addresses to her till he had first made his parents acquainted with the matter. He told them, and desired them to *get her for him to wife*, v. 2. Herein he is an example to all children. Conformably to the law of the fifth commandment, children ought not to marry, nor to move towards marrying, without the advice and consent of their parents; those that do (as bishop Hall here expresses it) *wilfully unchild themselves, and exchange natural affections for violent*. Parents have a property in their children as parts of themselves. In marriage this property is transferred; for such is the law of the relation that *a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife*. It is therefore not only unkind and ungrateful, but very unjust, to alienate this property without their concurrence; whoso thus *robbeth his father or mother*, stealing himself from them, who is nearer and dearer to them than their goods, and yet saith, *It is no transgression, the same is the companion of a destroyer*, Prov. xxviii. 24. (3.) His parents did well to dissuade him from yoking himself thus unequally with unbelievers. Let those who profess religion, but are courting an affinity with the profane and irreligious, matching into families where they have reason to think the fear of God is not, nor the worship of God, let them hear their reasoning, and apply it to themselves: "*Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren*, or, if none of our tribe, *never a one among all thy people*, never an Israelite, that pleases thee, or that thou canst think worthy of thy affection, that thou shouldest marry a Philistine?" In the old world the sons of God corrupted and ruined themselves, their families, and that truly

primitive church, by marrying with the *daughters of men*, Gen. vi. 2. God had forbidden the people of Israel to marry with the devoted nations, one of which the Philistines were, Deut. vii. 3. (4.) If there had not been a special reason for it, it certainly would have been improper in him to insist upon his choice, and in them to agree to it at last. Yet their tender compliance with his affections may be observed as an example to parents not to be unreasonable in crossing their children's choices, nor to deny their consent, especially to those that have seasonably and dutifully asked it, without some very good cause. As children must *obey their parents in the Lord*, so parents must not *provoke their children to wrath, lest they be discouraged*. This Nazarite, in his subjection to his parents, asking their consent, and not proceeding till he had it, was not only an example to all children, but a type of the holy child Jesus, who *went down with his parents to Nazareth* (thence called a *Nazarene*) and was subject to them, Luke ii. 51.

2. But this treaty of marriage is expressly said to be *of the Lord*, v. 4. Not only that God afterwards overruled it to serve his designs against the Philistines, but that he put it into Samson's heart to make this choice, that he *might have occasion against the Philistines*. It was not a thing evil in itself for him to marry a Philistine. It was forbidden because of the danger of receiving hurt by idolaters; where there was not only no danger of that kind, but an opportunity hoped for of doing that hurt to them which would be good service to Israel, the law might well be dispensed with. It was said (*ch. xiii. 25*) that *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times*, and we have reason to think he himself perceived that Spirit to move him at this time, when he made this choice, and that otherwise he would have yielded to his parents' dissuaves, nor would they have consented at last if he had not satisfied them it was *of the Lord*. This would bring him into acquaintance and converse with the Philistines, by which he might have such opportunities of galling them as otherwise he could not have. It should seem, the way in which the Philistines oppressed Israel was, not by great armies, but by the clandestine incursions of their giants and small parties of their plunderers. In the same way therefore Samson must deal with them; let him but by this marriage get among them, and he would be a *thorn in their sides*. Jesus Christ, having to deliver us from this present evil world, and to cast out the prince of it, did himself visit it, though full of pollution and enmity, and, by assuming a body, did in some sense join in affinity with it, that he might destroy our spiritual enemies, and his own arm might work the salvation.

II. Samson, by a special providence, is

animated and encouraged to attack the Philistines. That being the service for which he was designed, God, when he called him to it, prepared him for it by two occurrences:—

1. By enabling him, in one journey to Timnath, to *kill a lion*, v. 5, 6. Many decline doing the service they might do because they *know not their own strength*. God let Samson know what he could do in the strength of the *Spirit of the Lord*, that he might never be afraid to look the greatest difficulties in the face. David, who was to complete the destruction of the Philistines, must try his hand first upon *a lion and a bear*, that thence he might infer, as we may suppose Samson did, that the uncircumcised Philistine should be as one of them, 1 Sam. xvii. 36. (1.) Samson's encounter with the lion was hazardous. It was a young lion, one of the fiercest sort, that set upon him, roaring for his prey, and setting his eye particularly upon him; *he roared in meeting him*, so the word is. He was all alone in the vineyards, whither he had rambled from his father and mother (who kept the high road), probably to eat grapes. Children consider not how they expose themselves to the roaring lion that seeks to devour when, out of a foolish fondness for liberty, they wander from under the eye and wing of their prudent pious parents. Nor do young people consider what lions lurk in the vineyards, the vineyards of red wines, as dangerous as snakes under the green grass. Had Samson met with this lion in the way, he might have had more reason to expect help both from God and man than here in the solitary vineyards, out of his road. But there was a special providence in it, and the more hazardous the encounter was, (2.) The victory was so much the more illustrious. It was obtained without any difficulty: he strangled the lion, and tore his throat as easily as he would have strangled a kid, yet without any instrument, not only no sword nor bow, but not so much as a staff or knife; he had *nothing in his hand*. Christ engaged the roaring lion, and conquered him in the beginning of his public work (Matt. iv. 1, &c.), and afterwards spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them *in himself*, as some read it, not by any instrument. He was *exalted in his own strength*. That which added much to the glory of Samson's triumph over the lion was that when he had done this great exploit he did not boast of it, did *not so much as tell his father nor mother* that which many a one would soon have published through the whole country. Modesty and humility make up the brightest crown of great performances.

2. By providing him, the next journey, with honey in the carcase of this lion, v. 8, 9. When he came down the next time to solemnize his nuptials, and his parents with him, he had the curiosity to turn aside into the vineyard where he had killed the lion,

perhaps that with the sight of the place he might affect himself with the mercy of that great deliverance, and might there solemnly give thanks to God for it. It is good thus to remind ourselves of God's former favours to us. There he found the carcase of the lion; the birds or beasts of prey, it is likely, had eaten the flesh, and in the skeleton a swarm of bees had knit, and made a hive of it, and had not been idle, but had there laid up a good stock of honey, which was one of the staple commodities of Canaan; such plenty there was of it that the land is said to *flow with milk and honey*. Samson, having a better title than any man to the hive, seizes the honey with his hands. This supposes an encounter with the bees; but he that dreaded not the lion's paws had no reason to fear their stings. As by his victory over the lion he was emboldened to encounter the Philistine-giants, if there should be occasion, notwithstanding their strength and fierceness, so by dislodging the bees he was taught not to fear the multitude of the Philistines; though they compassed him about like bees, yet in the name of the Lord he should destroy them, Ps. cxviii. 12. Of the honey he here found, (1.) He ate himself, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for the dead bones of an unclean beast had not that ceremonial pollution in them that the bones of a man had. John Baptist, that Nazarite of the New Testament, lived upon wild honey. (2.) He gave to his parents, and they did eat; he did not eat all himself. *Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee*, and no more, Prov. xxv. 16. He let his parents share with him. Children should be grateful to their parents with the fruits of their own industry, and so *show piety at home*, 1 Tim. v. 4. Let those that by the grace of God have found sweetness in religion themselves communicate their experience to their friends and relations, and invite them to come and share with them. He told not his parents whence he had it, lest they should scruple eating it. Bishop Hall observes here that *those are less wise and more scrupulous than Samson that decline the use of God's gifts because they find them in ill vessels*. Honey is honey still, though in a dead lion. Our Lord Jesus having conquered Satan, that roaring lion, believers find honey in the carcase, abundant strength and satisfaction, enough for themselves and for all their friends, from that victory.

10 So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. 11 And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12 And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you:

if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments: 13 But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. 14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle. 15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? *is it not so?* 16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? 17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people. 18 And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What *is* sweeter than honey? and what *is* stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, if ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle. 19 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house. 20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

We have here an account of Samson's wedding feast and the occasion it gave him to fall foul upon the Philistines.

I. Samson conformed to the custom of the country in making a festival of his nuptial solemnities, which continued seven days, *v. 10*. Though he was a Nazarite, he did not affect, in a thing of this nature, to be singular, but did *as the young men used to do* upon such occasions. It is no part of religion to go contrary to the innocent usages of the places where we live: nay, it is a reproach to religion when those who profess it give just occasion to others to call them covetous, sneaking, and morose. A good man should strive to make himself, in the best sense, a good companion.

II. His wife's relations paid him the accustomed respect of the place upon that occasion, and brought him thirty young men to keep him company during the solemnity, and to attend him as his grooms-men (*v. 11*): *When they saw him*, what a comely man he was, and what an ingenuous graceful look he had, they brought him these to do him honour, and to improve by his conversation while he staid among them. Or, rather when they saw him, what a strong stout man he was; they brought these, seemingly to be his companions, but really to be a guard upon him, or spies to observe him. Jealous enough they were of him, but would have been more so had they known of his victory over the lion, which therefore he had industriously concealed. The favours of Philistines have often some mischief or other designed in them.

III. Samson, to entertain the company, propounds a riddle to them, and lays a wager with them that they cannot find it out in seven days, *v. 12—14*. The usage, it seems, was very ancient upon such occasions, when friends were together, to be innocently merry, not to spend all the time in dull eating and drinking, as bishop Patrick expresses it, or in other gratifications of sense, as music, dancing, or shows, but to propose questions, by which their learning and ingenuity might be tried and improved. This becomes men, wise men, that value themselves by their reason; but very unlike to it are the infamous and worse than brutish entertainments of this degenerate age, which send nothing round but the glass and the health, till reason is drowned, and wisdom sunk. Now, 1. Samson's riddle was his own invention, for it was his own achievement that gave occasion for it: *Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness*. Read my riddle, what is this? Beasts of prey do not yield meat for man, yet *food came from the devourer*; and those creatures that are strong when they are alive commonly smell strong and are every way offensive when they are dead, as horses, and yet *out of the strong, or out of the bitter, so the Syriac and Arabic read it, came sweetness*. If they had but so much sense as to consider what eater is most strong, and what meat is most sweet, they would have found out

the riddle, and neither lions nor honey were such strangers to their country that the thoughts of them needed to be out of the way; and the solving of the riddle would have given him occasion to tell them the entertaining story on which it was founded. This riddle is applicable to many of the methods of divine providence and grace. When God, by an over-ruling providence, brings good out of evil to his church and people,—when that which threatened their ruin turns to their advantage,—when their enemies are made serviceable to them, and the wrath of men turns to God's praise,—then comes *meat out of the eater and sweetness out of the strong*. See Phil. i. 12. 2. His wager was more considerable to him than to them, because he was one against thirty partners. It was not a wager laid upon God's providence, or upon the chance of a die or a card, but upon their ingenuity, and amounted to no more than an honorary recompence of wit and a disgrace upon stupidity.

IV. His companions, when they could not expound the riddle themselves, obliged his wife to get from him the exposition of it, *v. 15*. Whether they were really of a dull capacity, or whether under a particular infatuation at this time, it was strange that none of the thirty could in all this time stumble upon so plain a thing as that, *What is sweeter than honey and what stronger than a lion?* It should seem that in wit, as well as manners, they were barbarous—barbarous indeed to threaten the bride that, if she would not use means with the bridegroom to let them into the meaning of it, they would *burn her and her father's house with fire*. Could any thing be more brutish? It was base enough to turn a jest into earnest, and those were unworthy of conversation that would grow so outrageous rather than confess their ignorance and lose so small a wager; nor would it save their credit at all to tell the riddle when they were told it. It was yet more villanous to engage Samson's wife to be a traitor to her own husband, and to pretend a greater interest in her than he had. Now that she was married she must *forget her own people*. Yet most inhuman of all was it to threaten, if she could not prevail, to burn her and all her relations with fire, and all for fear of losing each of them the value of a shirt and a coat: *Have you called us to take what we have?* Those must never lay wagers that cannot lose more tamely and easily than thus.

V. His wife, by unreasonable importunity, obtains from him a key to his riddle. It was on the seventh day, that is, the seventh day of the week (as Dr. Lightfoot conjectures), but the fourth day of the feast, that they solicited her to entice her husband (*v. 15*), and she did it, 1. With great art and management (*v. 16*), resolving not to believe he loved her, unless he would gratify her in

this thing. She knew he could not bear to have his love questioned, and therefore, if any thing would work upon him, that would: "Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not, if thou deniest me;" whereas he had much more reason to say, "Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not, if thou insistest on it." And, that she might not make this the test of his affection, he assures her he had not told his own parents, notwithstanding the confidence he reposed in them. If this prevail not, she will try the powerful eloquence of tears: she *wept before him* the rest of the days of the feast, choosing rather to mar the mirth, as the bride's tears must needs do, than not gain her point, and oblige her countrymen, v. 17. 2. With great success. At last, being quite wearied with her importunity, he told her what was the meaning of his riddle, and though we may suppose she promised secrecy, and that if he would but let her know she would tell nobody, she immediately told it to the children of her people; nor could he expect better from a Philistine, especially when the interests of her country were ever so little concerned. See Mic. vii. 5, 6. The riddle is at length *unriddled* (v. 18): *What is sweeter than honey, or a better meat?* Prov. xxiv. 13. *What is stronger than a lion, or a greater devourer?* Samson generously owns they had won the wager, though he had good reason to dispute it, because they had not declared the riddle, as the bargain was (v. 12), but it had been declared to them. But he only thought fit to tell them of it: *If you had not ploughed with my heifer, made use of your interest with my wife, you would not have found out my riddle.* Satan, in his temptations, could not do us the mischief he does if he did not plough with the heifer of our own corrupt nature.

VI. Samson pays his wager to these Philistines with the spoils of others of their countrymen, v. 19. He took this occasion to quarrel with the Philistines, went down to Ashkelon, one of their cities, where probably he knew there was some great festival observed at this time, to which many flocked, out of whom he picked out thirty, slew them, and took their clothes, and gave them to those that had expounded the riddle; so that, in balancing the account, it appeared that the Philistines were the losers, for one of the lives they lost was worth all the suits of clothes they won: the body is more than raiment. *The Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, both to authorize and to enable him to do this.

VII. This proves a good occasion of weaning Samson from his new relations. He found how his companions had abused him and how his wife had betrayed him, and therefore *his anger was kindled*, v. 19. Better be angry with Philistines than in love with them, because, when we join ourselves to them, we are most in danger of being en-

snared by them. And, meeting with this ill usage among them, he *went up to his father's house*. It were well for us if the unkindnesses we meet with from the world, and our disappointments in it, had but this good effect upon us, to oblige us by faith and prayer to return to our heavenly Father's house and rest there. The inconveniences that occur in our way should make us love home and long to be there. No sooner had he gone than his wife was disposed of to another, v. 20. Instead of begging his pardon for the wrong she had done him, when he justly signified his resentment of it only by withdrawing in displeasure for a time, she immediately marries him that was the chief of the guests, the friend of the bridegroom, whom perhaps she loved too well, and was too willing to oblige, when she got her husband to tell her the riddle. See how little confidence is to be put in man, when those may prove our enemies whom we have used as our friends.

## CHAP. XV.

Samson, when he courted an alliance with the Philistines, did but seek an occasion against them, ch. xiv. 4. Now here we have a further account of the occasion he took to weaken them, and to avenge, not his own, but Israel's quarrels, upon them. Every thing here is surprising; if any thing be thought incredible, because impossible, it must be remembered that with God nothing is impossible, and it was by the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him that he was both directed to and strengthened for those unusual ways of making war. I. From the perfidiousness of his wife and her father, he took occasion to burn their corn, ver. 1-5. II. From the Philistines' barbarous cruelty to his wife and her father, he took occasion to smite them with a great slaughter, ver. 6-8. III. From the treachery of his countrymen, who delivered him bound to the Philistines, he took occasion to kill 1000 of them with the jaw-bone of an ass, ver. 9-17. IV. From the distress he was then in for want of water, God took occasion to show him favour in a seasonable supply, ver. 18-20.

**B**UT it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in. 2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her. 3 And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure. 4 And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. 5 And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shoeks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives. 6 Then the Philistines said,

Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire. 7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. 8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Here is, I. Samson's return to his wife, whom he had left in displeasure; not hearing perhaps that she was given to another, when time had a little cooled his resentments, he came back to her, *visited her with a kid*, v. 1. The value of the present was inconsiderable, but it was intended as a token of reconciliation, and perhaps was then so used, when those that had been at variance were brought together again; he sent this, that he might sup with her in her apartments, and she with him, on his provision, and so they might be friends again. It was generously done of Samson, though he was the party offended and the superior relation, to whom therefore she was bound in duty to sue for peace and to make the first motion of reconciliation. When differences happen between near relations, let those be ever reckoned the wisest and the best that are most forward to forgive and forget injuries and most willing to stoop and yield for peace' sake.

II. The repulse he met with. Her father forbade him to come near her; for truly he had married her to another, v. 2. He endeavours, 1. To justify himself in this wrong: *I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her*. A very ill opinion he had of Samson, measuring that Nazarite by the common temper of the Philistines; could he think worse of him than to suspect that, because he was justly angry with his wife, he utterly hated her, and, because he had seen cause to return to his father's house for a while, therefore he had abandoned her for ever? Yet this is all he had to say in excuse of this injury. Thus he made the worst of jealousies to patronize the worst of robberies. But it will never bear us out in doing ill to say, "We thought others designed ill." 2. He endeavours to pacify Samson by offering him his younger daughter, whom, because the handsomer, he thought Samson might accept, in full recompence for the wrong. See what confusions those did admit and bring their families to that were not governed by the fear and law of God, marrying a daughter this week to one and next week to another, giving a man one daughter first and then another. Samson scorned his pro-

posal; he knew better things than to *take a wife to her sister*, Lev. xviii. 18.

III. The revenge Samson took upon the Philistines for this abuse. Had he designed herein only to plead his own cause he would have challenged his rival, and would have chastised him and his father-in-law only. But he looks upon himself as a public person, and the affront as done to the whole nation of Israel, for probably they put this slight upon him because he was of that nation, and pleased themselves with it, that they had put such an abuse upon an Israelite; and therefore he resolves to do the Philistines a displeasure, and does not doubt but, this treatment which he had met with among them would justify him in it (v. 3): *Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines*. He had done what became him in offering to be reconciled to his wife, but, she having rendered it impracticable, now they could not blame him if he showed his just resentment. Note, When differences arise we ought to do our duty in order to the ending of them, and then, whatever the ill consequences of them may be, we shall be blameless. Now the way Samson took to be revenged on them was by setting their corn-fields on fire, which would be a great weakening and impoverishing to the country, v. 4, 5. 1. The method he took to do it was very strange. He sent 150 couple of foxes, tied tail to tail, into the corn-fields; every couple had a stick of fire between their tails, with which, being terrified, they ran into the corn for shelter, and so set fire to it; thus the fire would break out in many places at the same time, and therefore could not be conquered, especially if this was done, as it is probable it was, in the night. He might have employed men to do it, but perhaps he could not find Israelites enough that had courage to do it, and he himself could do it but in one place at a time, which would not effect his purpose. We never find Samson, in any of his exploits, making use of any person whatsoever, either servant or soldier, therefore, in this project, he chose to make use of foxes as his incendiaries. They had injured Samson by their subtlety and malice, and now Samson returns the injury by subtle foxes and mischievous fire-brands. By the meanness and weakness of the animals he employed, he designed to put contempt upon the enemies he fought against. This stratagem is often alluded to to show how the church's adversaries, that are of different interests and designs among themselves, that look and draw contrary ways in other things, yet have often united in a fire-brand, some cursed project or other, to waste the church of God, and particularly to kindle the fire of division in it. 2. The mischief he hereby did to the Philistines was very great. It was in the time of wheat harvest (v. 1), so that the straw being dry it soon burnt the shocks of corn that were cut.

and the standing corn, and the vineyards and olives. This was a waste of the good creatures, but where other acts of hostility are lawful destroying the forage is justly reckoned to be so: if he might take away their lives, he might take away their livelihood. And God was righteous in it: the corn, and the wine, and the oil, which they had prepared for Dagon, to be a meat-offering to him, were thus, in the season thereof, made a burnt-offering to God's justice.

IV. The Philistines' outrage against Samson's treacherous wife and her father. Understanding that they had provoked Samson to do this mischief to the country, the rabble set upon them and burnt them with fire, perhaps in their own house, *v. 6*. Samson himself they durst not attack, and therefore, with more justice than perhaps they themselves designed in it, they wreak their vengeance upon those who, they could not but own, had given him cause to be angry. Instead of taking vengeance upon Samson, they took vengeance for him, when he, out of respect to the relation he had stood in to them, was not willing to do it for himself. See his hand in it *to whom vengeance belongs*. Those that deal treacherously shall be spoiled and dealt treacherously with; and *the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, especially when, as here, he makes use of his people's enemies as instruments for revenging one upon another his people's quarrels. When a barbarous Philistine sets fire to a treacherous one, the *righteous may rejoice to see the vengeance*, Ps. lvi. 10, 11. Thus shall the wrath of man praise God, Ps. lxxvi. 10. The Philistines had threatened Samson's wife that, if she would not get the riddle out of him, they would *burn her and her father's house with fire*, *ch. xiv. 15*. She, to save herself and oblige her countrymen, betrayed her husband; and what came of it? The very thing that she feared, and sought by sin to avoid, came upon her: she and her father's house were burnt with fire, and her countrymen, whom she sought to oblige by the wrong she did to her husband, brought this evil upon her. The mischief we seek to escape by any unlawful practices we often pull upon our own heads. *He that will thus save his life shall lose it*.

V. The occasion Samson took hence to do them a yet greater mischief, which touched their bone and their flesh, *v. 7, 8*. "Though you have done this to them, and thereby shown what you would do to me if you could, yet that shall not deter me from being further vexatious to you." Or, "Though you think, by doing this, you have made me satisfaction for the affront I received among you, yet I have Israel's cause to plead as a public person, and for the wrongs done to them *I will be avenged on you*, and, if you will then forbear your insults, I will cease, aiming at no more than the deliverance of

Israel." So he smote them *hip and thigh with a great stroke*, so the word is. We suppose the wounds he gave them to have been mortal, as wounds in the hip or thigh often prove, and therefore translate it, *with a great slaughter*. Some think he only lamed them, disabled them for service, as horses were boughed or ham-strung. It seems to be a phrase used to express a desperate attack: he killed them pell-mell, or routed them horse and foot. He smote them with his hip upon thigh, that is, with the strength he had, not in his arms and hands, but in his hips and thighs, for he kicked and spurned at them, and so mortified them, *trod them in his anger*, and *trampled them in his fury*, Isa. lxiii. 3. And, when he had done, he retired to a natural fortress in the top of the rock Etam, where he waited to see whether the Philistines would be tamed by the correction he had given them.

9 Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. 12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. 13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. 14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. 15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. 16 And



Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. 17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

Here is, I. Samson violently pursued by the Philistines. They went up in a body, a more formidable force than they had together when Samson smote them hip and thigh; and they pitched in Judah, and spread themselves up and down the country, to find out Samson, who they heard had come this way, *v.* 9. When the men of Judah, who had tamely submitted to their yoke, pleaded that they had paid their tribute, and that none of their tribe had given them any offence, they freely own they designed nothing in this invasion but to seize Samson; they would fight *neither against small nor great*, but only that judge of Israel (*v.* 10), *to do to him as he has done to us*, that is, to smite his hip and thigh, as he did ours—*an eye for an eye*. Here was an army sent against one man, for indeed he was himself an army. Thus a whole band of men was sent to seize our Lord Jesus, that blessed Samson, though a tenth part would have served now that his hour had come, and ten times as many would have done nothing if he had not yielded.

II. Samson basely betrayed and delivered up by the men of Judah, *v.* 11. Of Judah were they? Degenerate branches of that valiant tribe! Utterly unworthy to carry in their standard *the lion of the tribe of Judah*. Perhaps they were disaffected to Samson because he was not of their tribe. Out of a foolish fondness for their forfeited precedency, they would rather be oppressed by Philistines than rescued by a Danite. Often has the church's deliverance been obstructed by such jealousies and pretended points of honour. Rather it was because they stood in awe of the Philistines, and were willing, at any rate, to get them out of their country. If their spirits had not been perfectly cowed and broken by their sins and troubles, and they had not been given up to a spirit of slumber, they would have taken this fair opportunity to shake off the Philistines' yoke. If they had had the least spark of ingenuousness and courage remaining in them, having so brave a man as Samson was to head them, they would now have made one bold struggle for the recovery of their liberty; but no marvel if those that had debased themselves to hell in the worship of their dung-hill gods (*Isa.* lvii. 9) thus debased themselves to the dust, in submission to their insulting oppressors. Sin dispirits men, nay, it infatuates them, and hides from their eyes the things that

belong to their peace. Probably Samson went into the border of that country to offer his service, *supposing his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them*, as Moses did, *Acts* vii. 25. But they thrust him from them, and very disingenuously, 1. Blamed him for what he had done against the Philistines, as if he had done them a great injury. Such ungrateful returns have those often received that have done the best service imaginable to their country. Thus our Lord Jesus did many good works, and for these they were ready to stone him. 2. They begged of him that he would suffer them to bind him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. Cowardly unthankful wretches! Fond of their fetters and in love with servitude! Thus the Jews delivered up our Saviour, under pretence of a fear lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation. With what a sordid servile spirit do they argue, *Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us?* And whose fault was that? They knew they had no right to rule over them, nor would they have been sold into their hands if they had not first *sold themselves to work wickedness*.

III. Samson tamely yielding to be bound by his countrymen, and delivered into the hands of his enraged enemies, *v.* 12, 13. How easily could he have beaten them off, and kept the top of his rock against these 3000 men, and none of them all could, or durst, have laid hands on him; but he patiently submitted, 1. That he might give an example of great meekness, mixed with great strength and courage; as one that had rule over his own spirit, he knew how to yield as well as how to conquer. 2. That, by being delivered up to the Philistines, he might have an opportunity of making a slaughter among them. 3. That he might be a type of Christ, who, when he had shown what he could do, in striking those down that came to seize him, yielded to be bound and led as a *lamb to the slaughter*. Samson justified himself in what he had done against the Philistines: "*As they did to me, so I did to them*; it was a piece of necessary justice, and they ought not to retaliate it upon me, for they began." He covenanted with the men of Judah that, if he put himself into their hands, they should not fall upon him themselves, because then he should be tempted to fall upon them, which he was very loth to do. This they promised him (*v.* 13), and then he surrendered. The men of Judah, being his betrayers, were in effect his murderers; they would not kill him themselves, but they did that which was worse, they delivered him into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who they knew would do worse than kill him, would abuse and torment him to death. Perhaps they thought, as some think Judas did when he betrayed Christ, that he would by his great strength deliver himself

out of their hands; but no thanks to them if he had delivered himself, and, if they thought he would do so, they might of themselves have thought this again, that he could and would deliver them too if they would adhere to him and make him their head. Justly is their misery prolonged who, to oblige their worst enemies, thus abuse their best friend. Never were men so infatuated except those who thus treated our blessed Saviour.

IV. Samson making his part good against the Philistines, even when he was delivered into their hands, fast pinioned with two new cords. The Philistines, when they had him among them, *shouted against him* (v. 14), so triumphing in their success, and insulting over him. If God had not tied their hands faster than the men of Judah had tied his, they would have shot at him (as their archers did at Saul) to dispatch him immediately, rather than have shouted at him, and given him time to help himself. But their security and joy were a presage of their ruin. When they shouted against him as a man run down, confident that all was their own, then the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, came mightily upon him, inspired him with more than ordinary strength and resolution. Thus fired, 1. He presently got clear of his bonds. The two new cords, upon the first struggle he gave, broke, and were *melted* (as the original word is) from off his hands, no doubt to the great amazement and terror of those that shouted against him, whose shouts were hereby turned into shrieks. Observe, When the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, his cords were loosed. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty*, and those are free indeed who are thus freed. This typified the resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit of holiness. In it he loosed the bands of death, and its cords, the grave-clothes, fell from his hands without being loosed, as Lazarus's were, because it was impossible that the mighty Saviour should be holden of them; and thus he triumphed over the powers of darkness that shouted against him, as if they had him sure. 2. He made a great destruction among the Philistines, who all gathered about him to make sport with him, r. 15. See how poorly he was armed: he had no better weapon than the jaw-bone of an ass, and yet what execution he did with it! he never laid it out of his hand till he had with it laid 1000 Philistines dead upon the spot; and thus that promise was more than accomplished. *One of you shall chase a thousand*, Josh. xxiii. 10. A jaw-bone was an inconvenient thing to grasp, and, one would think, might easily be wrested out of his hand, and a few such blows as he gave with it might have crushed and broken it, and yet it held good to the last. Had it been the jaw-bone of a lion, especially that which he himself had slain, it might have helped to heighten his fancy and to make him think himself the more formidable; but to take the

bone of that despicable animal was to do wonders by the *foolish things of the world*, that the *excellency of the power might be of God and not of man*. One of David's worthies slew 300 Philistines at once, but it was *with a spear*, 1 Chron. xi. 11. Another slew of them till his hand was weary and stuck to his sword, 2 Sam. xxiii. 10. But they all came short of Samson. What could be thought too hard, too much, for him to do, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily! *Through God we shall do valiantly*. It was strange the men of Judah did not now come in to his aid: cowards can strike a falling enemy. But he was to be a type of him that *trod the wine-press alone*.

V. Samson celebrating his own victory, since the men of Judah would not do even that for him. He composed a short song, which he sang to himself, for the daughters of Israel did not meet him, as afterwards they did Saul, to sing, with more reason, *Samson hath slain his thousands*. The burden of this song was, *With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, have I slain a thousand men*, v. 16. The same word in Hebrew (*chamor*) signifies both an *ass* and a *heap*, so that this is an elegant paronomasia, and represents the Philistines falling as tameiy as asses. He also gave a name to the place, to perpetuate the Philistines' disgrace, v. 17. *Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone*. Yet he did not vain-gloriously carry the bone about with him for a show, but threw it away when he had done with it. So little were relics valued then.

18 And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? 19 But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Leli unto this day. 20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Here is, 1. The distress which Samson was in after this great performance (v. 18): *He was sore athirst*. It was a natural effect of the great heat he had been in, and the great pains he had taken; his zeal consumed him, ate him up, and made him forget himself, till, when he had time to pause a little, he found himself reduced to the last extremity for want of water and ready to faint. Perhaps there was a special hand of God in it, as there was in the whole transaction; and God would hereby keep him from being

proud of his great strength and great achievements, and let him know that he was but a man, and liable to the calamities that are common to men. And Josephus says, It was designed to chastise him for not making mention of God and his hand in his memorial of the victory he had obtained, but taking all the praise to himself: *I have slain a thousand men*; now that he is ready to die for thirst he is under a sensible conviction that his own arm could not have saved him, without God's right hand and arm. Samson had drunk largely of the blood of the Philistines, but blood will never quench any man's thirst. Providence so ordered it that there was no water near him, and he was so fatigued that he could not go far to seek it; the men of Judah, one would think, should have met him, now that he had come off a conqueror, *with bread and wine*, as Melchizedek did Abram, to atone for the injury they had done him; but so little notice did they take of their deliverer that he was ready to perish for want of a draught of water. Thus are the greatest slights often put upon those that do the greatest services. Christ, on the cross, said, *I thirst*.

II His prayer to God in this distress. Those that forget to attend God with their praises may perhaps be compelled to attend him with their prayers. Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God. Two things he pleads with God in this prayer, 1. His having experienced the power and goodness of God in his late success: *Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant*. He owns himself God's servant in what he had been doing: "Lord, wilt thou not own a poor servant of thine, that has spent himself in thy service? *I am thine, save me*." He calls his victory a *deliverance*, a *great deliverance*; for, if God had not helped him, he had not only not conquered the Philistines, but had been swallowed up by them. He owns it to come from God, and now corrects his former error in assuming it too much to himself; and this he pleads in his present strait. Note, Past experiences of God's power and goodness are excellent pleas in prayer for further mercy. "Lord, thou hast delivered often, wilt thou not deliver still? 2 Cor. i. 10. Thou hast begun, wilt thou not finish? Thou hast done the greater, wilt thou not do the less?" Ps. lvi. 13. 2. His being now exposed to his enemies: *Lest I fall into the hands of the uncircumcised*, and then they will triumph, *will tell it in Gath, and in the streets of Ashkelon*; and will it not redound to God's dishonour if his champion become so easy a prey to the uncircumcised?" The best pleas are those taken from God's glory.

III. The seasonable relief God sent him. God heard his prayer, and sent him water, either out of the bone or out of the earth through the bone, v. 19. That bone which he had made an instrument of God's service

! God, to recompense him, made an instrument of his supply. But I rather incline to our marginal reading: *God clave a hollow place that was in Lehi*: the place of this action was, from the jaw-bone, called *Lehi*; even before the action we find it so called, v. 9, 14. And there, in that field, or hill, or plain, or whatever it was, that was so called, God caused a fountain suddenly and seasonably to open just by him, and water to spring up out of it in abundance, which continued a well ever after. Of this fair water he drank, and his spirits revived. We should be more thankful for the mercy of water did we consider how ill we can spare it. And this instance of Samson's relief should encourage us to trust in God, and seek to him, for, when he pleases, he can *open rivers in high places*. See Isa. xli. 17, 18.

IV. The memorial of this, in the name Samson gave to this upstart fountain, *En-hakkore, the well of him that cried*, thereby keeping in remembrance both his own distress, which occasioned him to cry, and God's favour to him, in answer to his cry. Many a spring of comfort God opens to his people, which may fitly be called by this name; it is *the well of him that cried*. Samson had given a name to the place which denoted him great and triumphant—*Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone*; but here he gives it another name, which denotes him needy and dependent.

V. The continuance of Samson's government after these achievements, v. 20. At length Israel submitted to him whom they had betrayed. Now it was past dispute that God was with him, so that henceforward they all owned him and were directed by him as their judge. *The stone which the builders refused became the head-stone*. It intimates the low condition of Israel that the government was dated by *the days of the Philistines*; yet it was a mercy to Israel that, though they were oppressed by a foreign enemy, yet they had a judge that preserved order and kept them from ruining one another. Twenty years his government continued, according to the usages of the judges' administration; but of the particulars we have no account, save of the beginning of his government in this chapter and the end of it in the next.

#### CHAP. XVI.

Samson's name (we have observed before) signifies a little sun (*sol parvus*); we have seen this sun rising very bright, and his morning ray strong and clear; and, nothing appearing to the contrary, we take it for granted that the middle of the day was proportionally illustrious, while he judged Israel twenty years; but the melancholy story of this chapter gives us such an account of his evening as did not commend his day. This little sun set under a cloud, and yet, just in the setting, darted forth one such strong and glorious beam as made him even then a type of Christ, conquering by death. Here is, 1. Samson greatly endangered by his familiarity with one harlot, and hardly escaping, ver. 1—3. 2. Samson quite ruined by his familiarity with another harlot, Delilah. Observe, 1. How he was betrayed to her by his own lusts, ver. 4. 2. How he was betrayed by her to his sworn enemies, the Philistines, who, (1.) By her means got it out of him at last where his great strength lay, ver. 5—17. (2.) Then robbed him of his strength, by taking from his head the crown of his separation, ver. 18—20. (3.) Then vexed him, blinded him, imprisoned him, abused him, and, at a solemn festival, made a show of him, ver. 21—25. But, lastly, he avenged himself of them by pulling down the theatre upon their heads, and so dying with them, ver. 26—31.

**T**HEN went Samson to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in unto her. 2 *And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.* 3 And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron.

Here is, 1. Samson's sin, v. 1. His taking a Philistine to wife, in the beginning of his time, was in some degree excusable, but to join himself to a harlot that he accidentally saw among them was such a profanation of his honour as an Israelite, as a Nazarite, that we cannot but blush to read it. *Tell it not in Gath.* This vile impurity makes the graceful visage of this Nazarite *blacker than a coal*, Lam. iv. 7, 8. We find not that Samson had any business at Gaza; if he went thither in quest of a harlot it would make one willing to hope that, as bad as things were otherwise, there were no prostitutes among the daughters of Israel. Some think he went thither to observe what posture the Philistines were in, that he might get some advantages against them; if so, he forgot his business, neglected that, and so fell into this snare. His sin began in his eye, with which he should have made a covenant; he saw there one in the *attire of a harlot*, and the lust which conceived brought forth sin: *he went in unto her.* 2. Samson's danger. Notice was sent to the magistrates of Gaza, perhaps by the treacherous harlot herself, that Samson was in the town, v. 2. Probably he came in a disguise, or in the dusk of the evening, and went into an inn or public-house, which happened to be kept by this harlot. The gates of the city were hereupon shut, guards set, all kept quiet, that Samson might suspect no danger. Now they thought they had him in a prison, and doubted not but to be the death of him the next morning. O that all those who indulge their sensual appetites in drunkenness, uncleanness, or any fleshly lusts, would see themselves thus surrounded, waylaid, and marked for ruin, by their spiritual enemies! The faster they sleep, and the more secure they are, the greater is their danger. 3. Samson's escape, v. 3. He rose at midnight, perhaps roused by a dream, in slumberings upon the bed (Job xxxiii. 15), by his guardian angel, or rather by the checks of his own conscience.

He arose with a penitent abhorrence (we hope) of the sin he was now committing, and of himself because of it, and with a pious resolution not to return to it,—rose under an apprehension of the danger he was in, that he was as one that slept upon the top of a mast,—rose with such thoughts as these: “Is this a bed fit for a Nazarite to sleep in? Shall a temple of the living God be thus polluted? Can I be safe under this guilt?” It was bad that he lay down without such checks; but it would have been worse if he had lain still under them. He makes immediately towards the gate of the city, probably finds the guards asleep, else he would have made them sleep their last, stays not to break open the gates, but plucks up the posts, takes them, gates and bar and all, all very large and strong and a vast weight, yet he carries them on his back several miles, *up to the top of a hill*, in disdain of their attempt to secure him with gates and bars, designing thus to render himself more formidable to the Philistines and more acceptable to his people, thus to give a proof of the great strength God had given him and a type of Christ's victory over death and the grave. He not only rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and so came forth himself, but carried away the gates of the grave, bar and all, and so left it, ever after, an open prison to all that are his; it shall not, it cannot, always detain them. *O death! where is thy sting?* Where are thy gates? Thanks be to him that not only gained a victory for himself, but giveth us the victory!

4 And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delilah. 5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength *lieth*, and by what *means* we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred *pieces* of silver. 6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength *lieth*, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee. 7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. 8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now *there were* men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines *be*

upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known. 10 And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound. 11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. 12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And *there were* liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread. 13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. 14 And she fastened *it* with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web. 15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart *is* not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength *lieth*. 16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; 17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.

The burnt child dreads the fire; yet Samson, that has more than the strength of a man, in this comes short of the wisdom of a child; for, though he had been more than once brought into the highest degree of mischief and danger by the love of women and lusting after them, yet he would not take warning, but is here again taken in the same snare, and this third time pays for all. Solomon seems to refer especially to this story

of Samson when, in his caution against uncleanness, he gives this account of a whorish woman (Prov. vii. 26), that *she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her*; and (Prov. vi. 26) that *the adulteress will hunt for the precious life*. This bad woman, that brought Samson to ruin, is here named *Delilah*, an infamous name, and fitly used to express the person, or thing, that by flattery or falsehood brings mischief and destruction on those to whom kindness is pretended. See here,

I. The affection Samson had for Delilah: he loved her, *v. 4*. Some think she was his wife, but then he would have had her home to his own house; others that he courted her to make her his wife; but there is too much reason to suspect that it was a sinful affection he had for her, and that he lived in uncleanness with her. Whether she was an Israelite or a Philistine is not certain. If an Israelite, which is scarcely probable, yet she had the heart of a Philistine.

II. The interest which the lords of the Philistines made with her to betray Samson, *v. 5*. 1. That which they told her they designed was to humble him, or afflict him; they would promise not to do him any hurt, only they would disable him not to do them any. And so much conscience it should seem they made of this promise that even then, when he lay ever so much at their mercy, they would not kill him, no, not when the razor that cut his hair might sooner and more easily have cut his throat. 2. That which they desired, in order hereunto, was to know where his great strength lay, and by what means he might be bound. Perhaps they imagined he had some spell or charm which he carried about with him, by the force of which he did these great things, and doubted not but that, if they could get this from him, he would be manageable; and therefore, having had reason enough formerly to know which was his blind side, hoped to find out his riddle a second time by ploughing with his heifer. They engaged Delilah to get it out of him, telling her what a kindness it would be to them, and perhaps assuring her it should not be improved to any real mischief, either to him or her. 3. For this they bid high, promised to give her each of them 1100 pieces of silver, 5500 in all. So many shekels amounted to above 1000*l.* sterling; with this she was hired to betray one she pretended to love. See what horrid wickedness the love of money is the root of. Our blessed Saviour was thus betrayed by one whom he called *friend*, and with a kiss too, for filthy lucre. No marvel if those who are unchaste, as Delilah, be unjust; such as lose their honesty in one instance will in another.

III. The arts by which he put her off from time to time, and kept his own counsel a great while. She asked him *where his great strength lay*, and whether it were possible for him to be bound and afflicted (*v. 6*),

pretending that she only desired he would satisfy her curiosity in that one thing, and that she thought it was impossible he should be bound otherwise than by her charms.

1. When she urged him very much, he told her, (1.) That he might be bound with *seven green withs*, v. 7. The experiment was tried (v. 8), but it would not do: he *broke the withs as easily as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire*, v. 9. (2.) When she still continued her importunity (v. 10) he told her that with two new ropes he might be so cramped and hampered that he might be as easily dealt with as any other man, v. 11. This experiment was tried too, but it failed: *the new ropes broke from off his arm like a thread*, v. 12. (3.) When she still pressed him to communicate the secret, and upbraided him with it as an unkindness that he had bantered her so long, he then told her that the weaving of the seven locks of his head would make a great alteration in him, v. 13. This came nearer the matter than any thing he had yet said, but it would not do. His strength appeared to be very much in his hair, when, upon the trial of this, purely by the strength of his hair, he carried away the *pin of the beam and the web*.

2. In the making of all these experiments, it is hard to say whether there appears more of Samson's weakness or Delilah's wickedness. (1.) Could any thing be more wicked than her restless and unreasonable importunity with him to discover a secret which she knew would endanger his life if ever it were lodged any where but in his own breast? What could be more base and disingenuous, more false and treacherous, than to lay his head in her lap, as one whom she loved, and at the same time to design the betraying of him to those by whom he was mortally hated? (2.) Could any thing be more weak than for him to continue a parley with one who, he so plainly saw, was aiming to do him a mischief,—that he should lend an ear so long to such an impudent request, that she might know how to do him a mischief,—that when he perceived liars in wait for him in the chamber, and that they were ready to apprehend him if they had been able, he did not immediately quit the chamber, with a resolution never to come into it any more,—nay, that he should again lay his head in that lap out of which he had been so often roused with that alarm, *The Philistines are upon thee, Samson?* One can hardly imagine a man so perfectly besotted, and void of all consideration, as Samson now was; but whoredom is one of those things that *take away the heart*. It is hard to say what Samson meant in suffering her to try so often whether she could weaken and afflict him; some think he did not certainly know himself where his strength lay, but, it should seem, he did know, for, when he told her that which would disable him indeed, it is said, *He told her all his heart*. It seems, he designed to banter her, and to try if he could

turn it off with a jest, and to baffle the *liers in wait*, and make fools of them; but it was very unwise in him that he did not quit the field as soon as ever he perceived that he was not able to keep the ground.

IV. The disclosure he at last made of this great secret; and, if the disclosure proved fatal to him, he must thank himself, who had not power to keep his own counsel from one that manifestly sought his ruin. *Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird*, but in Samson's sight is the net spread, and yet he is taken in it. If he had not been blind before the Philistines put out his eyes, he might have seen himself betrayed. Delilah signifies a *consumer*; she was so to him. Observe, 1. How she teased him, telling him she would not believe he loved her, unless he would gratify her in this matter (v. 15). *How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?* That is, "when thou canst not trust me with the counsels of thy heart?" Passionate lovers cannot bear to have their love called in question; they would do any thing rather than their sincerity should be suspected. Here therefore Delilah had this fond fool (excuse me that I call him so) at an advantage. This expostulation is indeed grounded upon a great truth, that those only have our love, not that have our good words or our good wishes, but that have our hearts. That is love without dissimulation; but it is falsehood and flattery in the highest degree to say we love those with whom our hearts are not. How can we say we love either our brother, whom we have seen, or God, whom we have not seen, if our hearts be not with him? She continued many days vexatious to him with her importunity, so that he had no pleasure of his life with her (v. 16); why then did he not leave her? It was because he was captivated to her by the power of love, falsely so called, but truly lust. This bewitched and perfectly intoxicated him, and by the force of it see, 2. How she conquered him (v. 17): *He told her all his heart*. God left him to himself to do this foolish thing, to punish him for indulging himself in the lusts of uncleanness. The angel that foretold his birth said nothing of his great strength, but only that he should be a Nazarite, and particularly that *no razor should come upon his head*, ch. xiii. 5. His consecration to God was to be his strength, for he was to be *strengthened according to the glorious power of that Spirit which wrought in him mightily*, that his strength, by promise, not by nature, might be a type and figure of the spiritual strength of believers, Col. i. 11, 29. Therefore the badge of his consecration was the pledge of his strength; if he lose the former, he knows he forfeits the latter. "If I be shaven, I shall no longer be a Nazarite, and then my strength will be lost." The making of his bodily strength to depend so much on his hair, which could have no natural influence

upon it either one way or other, teaches us to magnify divine institutions, and to expect God's grace, and the continuance of it, only in the use of those means of grace wherein he has appointed us to attend upon him, the word, sacraments, and prayer. In these earthen vessels is this treasure.

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. 19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. 20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. 21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

We have here the fatal consequences of Samson's folly in betraying his own strength; he soon paid dearly for it. *A whore is a deep ditch; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.* In that pit Samson sinks. Observe, 1. What care Delilah took to make sure of the money for herself. She now perceived, by the manner of his speaking, that he had told her all his heart, and the lords of the Philistines that hired her to do this base thing are sent for; but they must be sure to bring the money in their hands, v. 18. The wages of unrighteousness are accordingly produced, unknown to Samson. It would have grieved one's heart to have seen one of the bravest men then in the world sold and bought, as a sheep for the slaughter; how does this instance sully all the glory of man, and forbid the strong man ever to boast of his strength! 2. What course she took to deliver him up to them according to the bargain. Many in the world would, for the hundredth part of what was here given Delilah, sell those that they pretend the greatest respect for. *Trust not in a friend then, put not confidence in a guide.* See what a treacherous method she took (v. 19): She made him sleep upon her knees. Josephus says, She gave him some intoxicating liquor, which laid him to sleep. What opiates she might steal into his cup we know not, but we cannot suppose that he knowingly drank

wine or strong drink, for that would have been a forfeiture of his Nazariteship as much as the cutting off of his hair. She pretended the greatest kindness even when she designed the greatest mischief, which yet she could not have compassed if she had not made him sleep. See the fatal consequences of security. Satan ruins men by rocking them asleep, flattering them into a good opinion of their own safety, and so bringing them to mind nothing and fear nothing, and then he robs them of their strength and honour and leads them captive at his will. When we sleep our spiritual enemies do not. When he was asleep she had a person ready to cut off his hair, which he did so silently and so quickly that it did not awake him, but plainly afflicted him; even in his sleep, his spirit manifestly sunk upon it. I think we may suppose that if this ill turn had been done to him in his sleep by some spiteful body, without his being himself accessory to it, as he was here, it would not have had this strange effect upon him; but it was his own wickedness that corrected him. It was his iniquity, else it would not have been so much his infelicity. 3. What little concern he himself was in at it, v. 20. He could not but miss his hair as soon as he awoke, and yet said, "I will shake myself as at other times after sleep," or, "as at other times when the Philistines were upon me, to make my part good against them." Perhaps he thought to shake himself the more easily, and that his head would feel the lighter, now that his hair was cut, little thinking how much heavier the burden of guilt was than that of hair. He soon found in himself some change, we have reason to think so, and yet wist not that the Lord had departed from him: he did not consider that this was the reason of the change. Note, Many have lost the favourable presence of God and are not aware of it; they have provoked God to withdraw from them, but are not sensible of their loss, nor ever complain of it. Their souls languish and grow weak, their gifts wither, every thing goes cross with them; and yet they impute not this to the right cause: they are not aware that God has departed from them, nor are they in any care to reconcile themselves to him or to recover his favour. When God has departed we cannot do as at other times. 4. What improvement the Philistines soon made of their advantages against him, v. 21. The Philistines took him when God had departed from him. Those that have thrown themselves out of God's protection become an easy prey to their enemies. If we sleep in the lap of our lusts, we shall certainly wake in the hands of the Philistines. It is probable they had promised Delilah not to kill him, but they took an effectual course to disable him. The first thing they did, when they had him in their hands and found they could manage him, was to put out his eyes, by applying fire

to them, says the Arabic version. They considered that his eyes would never come again, as perhaps his hair might, and that the strongest arms could do little without eyes to guide them, and therefore, if now they blind him, they for ever blind him. His eyes were the inlets of his sin: he saw the harlot at Gaza, and went in unto her (v. 1), and now his punishment began there. Now that the Philistines had blinded him he had time to remember how his own lust had blinded him. The best preservative of the eyes is to turn them away from beholding vanity. *They brought him down to Gaza*, that there he might appear in weakness where he had lately given such proofs of his strength (v. 3), and be a jest to those to whom he had been a terror. *They bound him with fetters of brass* who had before been held in the cords of his own iniquity, and he did *griev* in the prison, work in their bridewell, either for their profit or his punishment, or for both. The devil does thus by sinners, *blinds the minds of those who believe not*, and so enslaves them, and secures them in his interests. Poor Samson, how hast thou fallen! How is thy honour laid in the dust! How has the glory and defence of Israel become the drudge and triumph of the Philistines! *The crown has fallen from his head; woe unto him, for he hath sinned.* Let all take warning by his fall carefully to preserve their purity, and to watch against all fleshly lusts; for all our glory has gone, and our defence departed from us, when the covenant of our separation to God, as spiritual Nazarites, is profaned.

22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. 23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. 25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. 26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon

them. 27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. 28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. 31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Though the last stage of Samson's life was inglorious, and one could wish there were a veil drawn over it, yet this account here given of his death may be allowed to lessen, though it does not quite roll away, the reproach of it; for there was honour in his death. No doubt he greatly repented of his sin, the dishonour he had by it done to God and his forfeiture of the honour God had put upon him; for that God was reconciled to him appears. 1. By the return of the sign of his Nazariteship (v. 22): *His hair began to grow again, as when he was shaven*, that is, to be as thick and as long as when it was cut off. It is probable that their general thanksgiving to Dagon was not long deferred, before which Samson's hair had thus grown, by which, and the particular notice taken of it, it seems to have been extraordinary, and designed for a special indication of the return of God's favour to him upon his repentance. For the growth of his hair was neither the cause nor the sign of the return of his strength further than as it was the badge of his consecration, and a token that God accepted him as a Nazarite again, after the interruption, without those ceremonies which were appointed for the restoration of a lapsed Nazarite, which he had not now the opportunity of perform-



ing, Num. vi. 9. It is strange that the Philistines in whose hands he was were not jealous of the growth of his hair again, and did not cut it; but perhaps they were willing his great strength should return to him, that they might have so much the more work out of him, and now that he was blind they were in no fear of any hurt from him. 2. By the use God made of him for the destruction of the enemies of his people, and that at a time when it would be most for the vindication of the honour of God, and not immediately for the defence and deliverance of Israel. Observe,

I. How insolently the Philistines affronted the God of Israel, 1. By the sacrifices they offered to Dagon, his rival. This Dagon they call their *god*, a god of their own making, represented by an image, the upper part of which was in the shape of a man, the lower part of a fish, purely the creature of fancy; yet it served them to set up in opposition to the true and living God. To this pretended deity they ascribe their success (*v. 23, 24*): *Our god has delivered Samson our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, into our hands.* So they dreamed, though he could do neither good nor evil. They knew Delilah had betrayed him, and they had paid her for doing it, yet they attribute it to their god, and are confirmed by it in their belief of his power to protect them. All people will thus walk in the name of their gods: they will give them the praise of their achievements; and shall not we pay this tribute to our God whose kingdom ruleth over all? Yet, considering what wicked arts they used to get Samson into their hands, it must be confessed it was only such a dunghill-deity as Dagon that was fit to be made a patron of the villany. Sacrifices were offered, and songs of praise sung, on the general thanksgiving day, for this victory obtained over one man; there were great expressions of joy, and all to the honour of Dagon. Much more reason have we to give the praise of all our successes to our God. *Thanks be to him who causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus!* 2. By the sport they made with Samson, God's champion, they reflected on God himself. When they were merry with wine, to make them more merry Samson must be fetched to make sport for them (*v. 25, 27*), that is, for them to make sport with. Having sacrificed to their god, and eaten and drunk upon the sacrifice, they rose up to play, according to the usage of idolaters (1 Cor. x. 7), and Samson must be the fool in the play. They made themselves and one another laugh to see how, being blind, he stumbled and blundered. It is likely they smote *this judge of Israel upon the cheek* (Mic. v. 1), and said, *Prophecy who smote thee.* It was an instance of their barbarity to trample thus upon a man in misery, at the sight of whom awhile ago they would have trembled. It put Samson into the depth of misery, and as a sword in his bones were their reproaches, when they said, *Where*

*is now thy God?* Nothing could be more grievous to so great a spirit; yet, being a penitent, his godly sorrow makes him patient, and he accepts the indignity as the punishment of his iniquity. How unrighteous soever the Philistines were, he could not but own that God was righteous. He had sported himself in his own deceivings and with his own deceivers, and justly are the Philistines let loose upon him to make sport with him. Uncleanliness is a sin that makes men vile, and exposes them to contempt. *A wound and dishonour shall he get whose heart is deceived by a woman, and his reproach shall not be wiped away.* Everlasting shame and contempt will be the portion of those that are blinded and bound by their own lusts. The devil that deceived them will insult over them.

II. How justly the God of Israel brought sudden destruction upon them by the hands of Samson. Thousands of the Philistines had got together, to attend their lords in the sacrifices and joys of this day, and to be the spectators of this comedy; but it proved to them a fatal tragedy, for they were all slain, and buried in the ruins of the house: whether it was a temple or a theatre, or whether it was some slight building run up for the purpose, is uncertain. Observe,

1. Who were destroyed: *All the lords of the Philistines* (*v. 27*), who had by bribes corrupted Delilah to betray Samson to them. Evil pursued those sinners. Many of the people likewise, to the number of 3000, and among them a great many women, one of whom, it is likely, was that harlot of Gaza mentioned, *v. 1*. Samson had been drawn into sin by the Philistine women, and now a great slaughter is made among them, as was by Moses's order among the women of Midian, because it was they that *caused the children of Israel to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor*, Num. xxxi. 16.

2. When they were destroyed. (1.) When they were merry, secure, and jovial, and far from apprehending themselves in any danger. When they saw Samson lay hold of the pillars, we may suppose, his doing so served them for a jest, and they made sport with that too: *What will this feeble Jew do?* How are sinners brought to desolation in a moment! They are lifted up in pride and mirth, that their fall may be the more dreadful. Let us never envy the mirth of wicked people, but infer from this instance that their triumphing is short and their joy but for a moment. (2.) It was when they were praising Dagon their god, and giving that honour to him which is due to God only, which is no less than treason against the King of kings, his crown and dignity. Justly therefore is the blood of these traitors mingled with their sacrifices. Belshazzar was cut off when he was praising his man-made gods, Dan. v. 4. (3.) It was when they were making sport with an Israelite, a Nazarite, and insulting over him, persecuting him whom God had

smitten. Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any person or people faster than mocking and misusing the servants of God, yea, though it is by their own folly that they are brought low. Those know not what they do, nor whom they affront, that make sport with a good man.

3. How they were destroyed. Samson pulled the house down upon them, God no doubt putting it into his heart, as a public person, thus to avenge God's quarrel with them, Israel's, and his own. (1.) He gained strength to do it by prayer, *v.* 28. That strength which he had lost by sin he, like a true penitent, recovers by prayer; as David, who, when he had provoked the Spirit of grace to withdraw, prayed (*Ps.* li. 12), *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.* We may suppose that this was only a mental prayer, and that his voice was not heard (for it was made in a noisy clamorous crowd of Philistines); but, though his voice was not heard of men, yet his prayer was heard of God and graciously answered, and though he lived not to give an account himself of this his prayer, as Nehemiah did of his, yet God not only accepted it in heaven, but, by revealing it to the inspired penman, provided for the registering of it in his church. He prayed to God to remember him and strengthen him this once, thereby owning that his strength for what he had already done he had from God, and begged it might be afforded to him once more, to give them a parting blow. That it was not from a principle of passion or personal revenge, but from a holy zeal for the glory of God and Israel, that he desired to do this, appears from God's accepting and answering the prayer. Samson died praying, so did our blessed Saviour; but Samson prayed for vengeance, Christ for forgiveness. (2.) He gained opportunity to do it by leaning on the two pillars which were the chief supports of the building, and were, it seems, so near together that he could take hold of them both at one time, *v.* 26, 29. Having hold of them, he bore them down with all his might, crying aloud, *Let me die with the Philistines,* *v.* 30. *Animamque in vulnere ponit While inflicting the wound he dies.* The vast concourse of people that were upon the roof looking down through it to see the sport, we may suppose, contributed to the fall of it. A weight so much greater than ever it was designed to carry might perhaps have sunk of itself, at least it made the fall more fatal to those within: and indeed few of either could escape being either stilled or crushed to death. This was done, not by any natural strength of Samson, but by the almighty power of God, and is not only marvellous, but miraculous, in our eyes. Now in this, [1.] The Philistines were greatly mortified. All their lords and great men were killed, and abundance of their people, and this in the midst of their triumph; the

temple of Dagon (as many think the house was) was pulled down, and Dagon buried in it. This would give a great check to the insolence of the survivors, and, if Israel had but had so much sense and spirit left them as to improve the advantages of this juncture, they might now have thrown off the Philistines' yoke. [2.] Samson may very well be justified, and brought in not guilty of any sinful murder either of himself or the Philistines. He was a public person, a declared enemy to the Philistines, against whom he might therefore take all advantages. They were now in the most barbarous manner making war upon him; all present were aiding and abetting, and justly die with him. Nor was he *felo de se*, or a *self-murderer*, in it; for it was not his own life that he aimed at, though he had too much reason to be weary of it, but the lives of Israel's enemies, for the reaching of which he bravely resigned his own, *not counting it dear to him, so that he might finish his course with honour.* [3.] God was very much glorified in pardoning Samson's great transgressions, of which this was an evidence. It has been said that the prince's giving a commission to one convicted amounts to a pardon. Yet, *though he was a God that forgave him, he took vengeance of his inventions* (*Ps.* xcix. 8), and, by suffering his champion to die in fetters, warned all to take heed of those lusts which war against the soul. However, we have good reason to hope that though Samson died with the Philistines he had not his everlasting portion with them. *The Lord knows those that are his.* [4.] Christ was plainly typified. He pulled down the devil's kingdom, as Samson did Dagon's temple; and, when he died, he obtained the most glorious victory over the powers of darkness. Then when his arms were stretched out upon the cross, as Samson's to the two pillars, he gave a fatal shake to the gates of hell, and, *through death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil* (*Heb.* ii. 14, 15), and herein exceeded Samson, that he not only died with the Philistines, but rose again to triumph over them.

*Lastly,* The story of Samson concludes, 1. With an account of his burial. His own relations, animated by the glories that attended his death, came and found out his body among the slain, brought it honourably to his own country, and buried it in the place of his fathers' sepulchres, the Philistines being in such a consternation that they durst not oppose it. 2. With the repetition of the account we had before of the continuance of his government: *He judged Israel twenty years;* and, if they had not been as mean and sneaking as he was brave and daring, he would have left them clear of the Philistines' yoke. They might have been easy, safe, and happy, if they would but have given God and their judges leave to make them so.

## CHAP. XVII

All agree that what is related in this and the rest of the chapters to the end of this book was not done, as the narrative occurs, after Samson, but long before, even soon after the death of Joshua, in the days of Phinehas the son of Eleazar, ch. xx. 26. But it is cast here into the latter part of the book that it might not interrupt the history of the Judges. That it might appear how happy the nation was in the judges it is here shown how unhappy they were when there was none. I. Then idolatry began in the family of Micah, ch. xviii. II. Then it spread itself into the tribe of Dan, ch. xviii. III. Then villany was committed in Gibeah of Benjamin, ch. xix. IV. Then that whole tribe was destroyed for countenancing it, ch. xx. V. Then strange expedients were adopted to keep up that tribe, ch. xxi. Therefore blessed be God for the government we are under! In this chapter we are told how Micah an Ephraimite furnished himself, 1. With an image for his god, ver. 1—6. 2. With a Levite, such a one as he was, for his priest, ver. 7—13.

**A**ND there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2 And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son. 3 And when he had restored the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. 4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother, and his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah. 5 And the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Here we have, I. Micah and his mother quarrelling. 1. The son robs the mother. The old woman had hoarded, with long scraping and saving, a great sum of money, 1100 pieces of silver. It is likely she intended, when she died, to leave it to her son: in the mean time it did her good to look upon it, and to count it over. The young man had a family of children grown up, for he had one of age to be a priest, v. 5. He knows where to find his mother's cash, thinks he has more need of it than she has, cannot stay till she dies, and so takes it away privately for his own use. Though it is a fault in parents to withhold from their children that which is meet, and lead them into temptation to wish them in their graves, yet even this will by no means excuse the

wickedness of those children that steal from their parents, and think all their own that they can get from them, though by the most indirect methods. 2. The mother curses the son, or whoever had taken her money. It should seem she suspected her son; for, when she cursed, she spoke in his ears so loud, and with so much passion and vehemence, as made both his ears to tingle. See what mischief the love of money makes, how it destroys the duty and comfort of every relation. It was the love of money that made Micah so undutiful to his mother as to rob her, and made her so unkind and void of natural affection to her son as to curse him if he had it and concealed it. Outward losses drive good people to their prayers, but bad people to their curses. This woman's silver was her god before it was made either into a graven or a molten image, else the loss of it would not have put her into such a passion as caused her quite to forget and break through all the laws of decency and piety. It is a very foolish thing for those that are provoked to throw their curses about as a madman that casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, since they know not but they may light upon those that are most dear to them.

II. Micah and his mother reconciled. 1. The son was so terrified with his mother's curses that he restored the money. Though he had so little grace as to take it, he had so much left as not to dare to keep it when his mother had sent a curse after it. He cannot believe his mother's money will do him any good without his mother's blessing, nor dares he deny the theft when he is charged with it, nor retain the money when it is demanded by the right owner. It is best not to do evil, but it is next best, when it is done, to undo it again by repentance, confession, and restitution. Let children be afraid of having the prayers of their parents against them; for, though the curse causeless shall not come, yet that which is justly deserved may be justly feared, even though it was passionately and indecently uttered. 2. The mother was so pleased with her son's repentance that she recalled her curses, and turned them into prayers for her son's welfare: *Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son.* When those that have been guilty of a fault appear to be free and ingenuous in owning it they ought to be commended for their repentance, rather than still be condemned and upbraided for their fault.

III. Micah and his mother agreeing to turn their money into a god, and set up idolatry in their family; and this seems to have been the first instance of the revolt of any Israelite from God and his instituted worship after the death of Joshua and the elders that out-lived him, and is therefore thus particularly related. And though this was only the worship of the true God by an image, against the *second* commandment, yet

this opened the door to the worship of other gods, Baahim and the groves, against the first and great commandment. Observe,

1. The mother's contrivance of this matter. When the silver was restored she pretended she had dedicated it to the Lord (v. 3), either before it was stolen, and then she would have this thought to be the reason why she was so much grieved at the loss of it and imprecated evil on him that had taken it, because it was a dedicated and therefore an accursed thing, or after it was stolen she had made a vow that, if she could retrieve it, she would dedicate it to God, and then she would have the providence that had so far favoured her as to bring it back to her hands to be an owning of her vow "Come," said she to her son, "the money is mine, but thou hast a mind to it; let it be neither mine nor thine, but let us both agree to make it into an image for a religious use." Had she put it to a use that was indeed for the service and honour of God, this would have been a good way of accommodating the matter between them; but, as it was, the project was wicked. Probably this old woman was one of those that came out of Egypt, and would have such images made as she had seen there; now that she began to dote she called to remembrance the follies of her youth, and perhaps told her son that this way of worshipping God by images was, to her knowledge, the old religion.

2. The son's compliance with her. It should seem, when she first proposed the thing he stumbled at it, knowing what the second commandment was; for, when she said (v. 3) she designed it for her son to make an image of, yet he restored it to his mother (being loth to have a hand in making the image), and she gave it to the founder and had the thing done, blaming him perhaps for scrupling at it, v. 4. But, when the images were made, Micah, by his mother's persuasion, was not only well reconciled to them, but greatly pleased and in love with them; so strangely hewitching was idolatry, and so much supported by traditions received from their parents, 1 Pet. i. 18; Jer. xlv. 17. But observe how the old woman's covetousness prevailed, in part, above her superstition. She had wholly dedicated the silver to make the graven and molten images (v. 3), all the 1100 pieces; but, when it came to be done, she made less than a fifth part serve, even 200 shekels, v. 4. She thought that enough, and indeed it was too much to give for an image that is a teacher of lies. Had it been devoted truly to the honour of God, he would not thus have been put off with part of the price, but would have signified his resentment of the affront, as he did in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Now observe,

(1.) What was the corruption here introduced, v. 5. The man Micah had a house of gods, a house of God, so the LXX., for so he

thought it, as good as that at Shiloh, and better, because his own, of his own inventing and at his own disposal; for people love to have their religion under their girdle, to manage it as they please. A house of error, so the Chaldee, for really it was so, a deviation from the way of truth and an inlet to all deceit. Idolatry is a great cheat, and one of the worst of errors. That which he aimed at in the progress of his idolatry, whether he designed it at first or no, was to mimic and rival both God's oracles and his ordinances [1.] His oracles; for he made *teraphim* little images which he might advise with as there was occasion, and receive informations, directions, and predictions from. What the *urim* and *thummim* were to the prince and people these *teraphim* should be to his family; yet he could not think that the true God would own them, or give answers by them, and therefore depended upon such demons as the heathen worshipped to inspire them and make them serviceable to him. Thus, while the honour of Jehovah was pretended (v. 3), yet, his institution being relinquished, these Israelites unavoidably lapsed into downright idolatry and demon-worship. [2.] His ordinances. Some room or apartment in the house of Micah was appointed for the temple or house of God; an ephod, or holy garment, was provided for his priest to officiate in, in imitation of those used at the tabernacle of God, and one of his sons he consecrated, probably the eldest, to be his priest. And, when he had set up a graven or molten image to represent the object of his worship, no marvel if a priest of his own getting and his own making served to be the manager of it. Here is no mention of any altar, sacrifice, or incense, in honour of these silver gods, but, having a priest, it is probable he had all these, unless we suppose that, at first, his gods were intended only to be advised with, not to be adored, like Laban's *teraphim*; but the beginning of idolatry, as of other sins, is like the letting forth of water: break the dam, and you bring a deluge. Here idolatry began, and it spread like a fretting leprosy. Dr. Lightfoot would have us observe that as 1100 pieces of silver were here devoted to the making of an idol, which ruined religion, especially in the tribe of Dan (as we shall presently find), which was Samson's tribe, so 1100 pieces of silver were given by each Philistine lord for the ruin of Samson.

(2.) What was the cause of this corruption (v. 6): There was no king in Israel, no judge or sovereign prince to take cognizance of the setting up of these images (which, doubtless, the country about soon resorted to), and to give orders for the destroying of them, none to convince Micah of his error and to restrain and punish him, to take this disease in time, by which the spreading of the infection might have been happily prevented. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

and then they soon did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord*. When they were without a king to keep good order among them, God's house was forsaken, his priests were neglected, and all went to ruin among them. See what a mercy government is, and what reason there is that not only *prayers and intercessions, but giving of thanks, should be made for kings and all in authority*, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Nothing contributes more, under God, to the support of religion in the world, than the due administration of those two great ordinances, magistracy and ministry.

7 And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. 8 And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a *place*: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9 And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, *I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place*. 10 And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten *shekels* of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in. 11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. 12 And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. 13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

We have here an account of Micah's furnishing himself with a Levite for his chaplain, either thinking his son, because the heir of his estate, too good to officiate, or rather, because not of God's tribe, not good enough. Observe,

I. What brought this Levite to Micah. By his mother's side he was of the family of Judah, and lived at Bethlehem among his mother's relations (for that was not a Levites' city), or, upon some other account, as a stranger or inmate, sojourned there, v. 7. Thence he went to *sojourn where he could find a place*, and in his travels came to the house of Micah in Mount Ephraim, v. 8. Now 1. Some think it was his unhappiness that he was under a necessity of removing, either because he was persecuted

and abused, or rather neglected and starved, at Bethlehem. God had made plentiful provision for the Levites, but the people withheld their dues, and did not help them into the possession of the cities assigned to them; so that they were reduced to straits, and no care was taken for their relief. Israel's forsaking God began with forsaking the Levites, which therefore they are warned against, Deut. xii. 19. It is a sign religion is going to decay when good ministers are neglected and at a loss for a livelihood. But, 2. It seems rather to have been his fault and folly, that he loved to wander, threw himself out where he was, and forfeited the respect of his friends, and, having a roving head, would go to seek his fortune, as we say. We cannot conceive that things had yet come to such a pass among them that a Levite should be poor, unless it was his own fault. As those are fit to be pitied that would fix but may not, so those are fit to be punished that might fix but will not. Unsettledness being, one would think, a constant uneasiness, it is strange that any Israelite, especially any Levite, should affect it.

II. What bargain Micah made with him. Had he not been well enough content with his son for his priest, he would have gone or sent abroad to enquire out a Levite, but now he only takes hold of one that drops into his hands, which showed that he had no great zeal in the matter. It is probable that this rambling Levite had heard, in the country, of Micah's house of *gods, his graven and molten image*, which, if he had had any thing of the spirit of a Levite in him, would have brought him thither to reprove Micah for his idolatry, to tell how directly contrary it was to the law of God, and how it would bring the judgments of God upon him; but instead of this, like a base and degenerate branch of that sacred tribe, thither he goes to offer his service, with, *Have you any work for a Levite?* for I am out of business, and go to sojourn where I may find a place; all he aimed at was to get bread, not to do good, v. 9. Micah courts him into his family (v. 10), and promises him, 1. Good preferment: *Be unto me a father and a priest*. Though a young man, and taken up at the door, yet, if he take him for a priest, he will respect him as a father, so far is he from setting him among his servants. He asks not for his credentials, takes no time to enquire how he behaved in the place of his last settlement, considers not whether, though he was a Levite, yet he might not be of such a bad character as to be a plague and scandal to his family, but thinks, though he should be ever so great a rake, he might serve for a priest to a graven image, like Jeroboam's priest of the *lowest of the people*, 1 Kings xii. 31. No marvel if those who can make any thing serve for a god can also make any thing serve for a priest. 2. A tolerable maintenance. He will allow him *meat, and*

*drink, and clothes, a double suit*, so the words in the margin, a better and a worse, one for every day's wear and one for holy days, and ten shekels, about twenty-five shillings, a year for spending money—a poor salary in comparison of what God provided for the Levites that behaved well; but those that forsake God's service will never better themselves, nor find a better master. The ministry is the best calling but the worst trade in the world.

III. The Levite's settlement with him (v. 11): He was *content to dwell with the man*; though his work was superstitious and his wages were scandalous, he objected against neither, but thought himself happy that he had lighted on so good a house. Micah, thinking himself holier than any of his neighbours, presumed to consecrate this Levite, v. 12. As if his building, furnishing, and endowing this chapel authorized him, not only to appoint the person that should officiate there, but to confer those orders upon him which he had no right to give nor the other to receive. And now he shows him respect as a father and tenderness as a son, and is willing thus to make up the deficiency of the coin he gave him.

IV. Micah's satisfaction in this (v. 13): *Now know I that the Lord will do me good* (that is, he hoped that his new establishment would gain reputation among his neighbours, which would turn to his advantage, for he would share in the profit of his altar; or, rather, he hoped that God would countenance and bless him in all he put his hand unto) *because I have a Levite to be my priest*. 1. He thought it was a sign of God's favour to him and his images that he had so opportunely sent a Levite to his door. Thus those who please themselves with their own delusions, if Providence unexpectedly bring any thing to their hands that furthers them in their evil way, are too apt to infer thence that God is pleased with them. 2. He thought now that the error of his priesthood was amended all was well, though he still retained his graven and molten image. Note, Many deceive themselves into a good opinion of their state by a partial reformation. They think they are as good as they should be, because, in some one particular instance, they are not so bad as they have been, as if the correcting of one fault would atone for their persisting in all the rest. 3. He thought the making of a Levite into a priest was a very meritorious act, which really was a presumptuous usurpation, and very provoking to God. Men's pride, and ignorance, and self-flattery, will undertake, not only to justify, but magnify and sanctify, the most daring impieties and invasions upon the divine prerogatives. With much reason might Micah have said, "Now may I fear that God will curse me, because I have debauched one of his own tribe, and drawn him into the worship of a graven image;" yet for this he

hopes God will do him good. 4. He thought that having a Levite in the house with him would of course entitle him to the divine favour. Carnal hearts are apt to build too much upon their external privileges, and to conclude that God will certainly do them good because they are born of godly parents, dwell in praying families, are linked in society with those that are very good, and sit under a lively ministry; whereas all this is but like having a Levite to be their priest, which amounts to no security at all that God will do them good, unless they be good themselves, and make a good use of these advantages.

#### CHAP. XVIII.

How idolatry crept into the family of Micah we read in the preceding chapter, how it was translated thence into the tribe of Dan we have an account in this chapter, and how it gained a settlement in a city of note; for how great a matter does a little fire kindle! The tribe of Dan had their lot assigned them last of all the tribes, and, it happening to be too strait for them, a considerable city in the utmost corner of Canaan northward was added to it, "Let them get it, and take it;" it was called Laish or Leshem, Josh. xix. 47. Now here we are told, I. How they sent spies to bring them an account of the place, who, by the way, got acquainted with Micah's priest, ver. 1-5. II. What an encouraging report these spies brought back, ver. 7-10. III. What forces were sent to conquer Laish, ver. 11-13. IV. How they, by the way, plundered Micah of his gods, ver. 14-25. V. How easily they conquered Laish, ver. 27-29, and, when they had it, set up the graven image in it, ver. 30, 31.

**I**N those days *there was no king in Israel*: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day *all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel*. 2 And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there. 3 When they *were* by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what maketh thou in this *place*? and what hast thou here? 4 And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. 5 And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. 6 And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the Lord *is* your way wherein ye go.

Here is, 1. The eye which these Danites had upon Laish, not the whole tribe of Dan

but one family of them, to whose lot, in the subdivision of Canaan, that city fell. Hither to this family had sojourned with their brethren, who had taken possession of their lot, which lay between Judah and the Philistines, and had declined going to their own city, because there was *no king in Israel* to rule over them, *v. 1*. It lay a great way off, separate from the rest of their tribe; it was entirely in the enemy's hand, and therefore they would sponge upon their brethren rather than go far to provide for themselves. But at length necessity forced them to arouse themselves, and they began to think of an inheritance to dwell in. It is better to have a little of one's own than always to hang upon others. 2. The enquiry which this family of the Danites made concerning Laish: They sent *five men to search the land* (*v. 2*), that they might know the character of the country, whether it was an inheritance worth going so far for, and the posture of the people, whether the making of themselves masters of it was a thing practicable, what force was necessary in order thereunto, and which was the best way of making an attack upon it. The men they sent were men of valour, who, if they fell into their enemies' hands, knew how to look danger in the face. It is prudent to look before we leap. Dan had the subtlety of a *serpent by the way* (Gen. xlix. 17), as well as the courage of a *lion's whelp, leaping from Bashan*, Deut. xxxiii. 22. 3. The acquaintance which their spies got with Micah's priest, and the use they made of that acquaintance. It seems, they had known this Levite formerly, he having in his rambles been sometimes in their country; and, though his countenance might be altered, they knew him again by his voice, *v. 3*. They were surprised to find him so far off, enquired what brought him thither, and he told them (*v. 4*) what business he had there, and what encouragement. They understanding that he had an oracle in his custody, desired he would tell them whether they should prosper in their present undertaking, *v. 5*. See their carelessness and regardlessness of God and his providence; they would not have enquired of the Lord at all if this Levite's mentioning the teraphim he had with him had not put it into their heads. Many never think of religion but just when it falls in their way and they cannot avoid it, like chance customers. See their ignorance of the divine law, that they thought God, who had forbidden the religious use of graven images, would yet own them in consulting an image, and give them an answer of peace. *Should he be enquired of by them?* Ezek. xiv. 3. They seem to have had a greater opinion of Micah's teraphim than of God's urim; for they had passed by Shiloh, and, for aught that appears, had not enquired there of God's high priest, but Micah's shabby Levite shall be an oracle to them. He betakes himself to his usual method of consulting his teraphim;

and, whether he himself believed it or no, he humoured the thing so well that he made them believe he had an answer from God encouraging them to go on, and assuring them of good success (*v. 6*): "*Go in peace, you shall be safe, and may be easy, for before the Lord is your way.*" that is, "he approves it" (as the Lord is said to *know the way of the righteous* with acceptance), "and therefore he will make it prosperous, his eye will be upon you for good, he will direct your way, and preserve your *going out and coming in.*" Note, Our great care should be that our way be such as God approves, and, if it he so, we may *go in peace*. If God care for us, on him let us cast our care, and be satisfied that we cannot miss our way if he *go before us*.

7 Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that *were* therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and *there was* no magistrate in the land, that might put *them* to shame in *any* thing; and they *were* far from the Zidonians, and had no business with *any* man. 8 And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, *What say ye?* 9 And they said, *Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.* 10 *When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.* 11 And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war. 12 And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan unto this day: behold, *it is* behind Kirjath-jearim. 13 And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

Here is, I. The observation which the spies made upon the city of Laish, and the posture of its inhabitants, *v. 7*. Never was place so ill governed and so ill guarded, which would make it a very easy prey to the invader.

1. It was ill governed, for every man might be as bad as he would, and there was

no magistrate, no heir of restraint (as the word is), that might so much as put them to shame in any thing, much less put them to death, so that by the most impudent immoralities they provoked God's wrath, and by all manner of mutual mischiefs weakened and consumed one another. See here, (1.) What the office of magistrates is. They are to be heirs of restraint, that is, to preserve a constant entail of power, as heirs to an inheritance, in the places where they are, for the restraining of that which is evil. They are possessors of restraint, entrusted with their authority for this end, that they may check and suppress every thing that is vicious and be a terror to evil doers. It is only God's grace that can renew men's depraved minds and turn their hearts; but the magistrate's power may restrain their bad practices and tie their hands, so that the wickedness of the wicked may not be either so injurious or so infectious as otherwise it would be. Though the sword of justice cannot cut up the root of bitterness, it may cut off its branches and hinder its growth and spreading, that vice may not go without a check, for then it becomes daring and dangerous, and the community shares in the guilt. (2.) See what method must be used for the restraint of wickedness. Sinners must be put to shame, that those who will not be restrained by the shamefulfulness of the sin before God and their own consciences may be restrained by the shamefulfulness of the punishment before men. All ways must be tried to dash sin out of countenance and cover it with contempt, to make people ashamed of their idleness, drunkenness, cheating, lying, and other sins, by making reputation always appear on virtue's side. (3.) See how miserable, and how near to ruin, those places are that either have no magistrates or none that bear the sword to any purpose; the wicked then walk on every side, Ps. xii. 8. And how happy we are in good laws and a good government.

2. It was ill guarded. The people of Laish were careless, quiet, and secure, their gates left open, their walls out of repair, because under no apprehension of danger in any way, though their wickedness was so great that they had reason to fear divine vengeance every day. It was a sign that the Israelites, through their sloth and cowardice, were not now such a terror to the Canaanites as they were when they first came among them, else the city of Laish, which probably knew itself to be assigned to them, would not have been so very secure. Though they were an open and inland town, they lived secure, like the Zidonians (who were surrounded with the sea and were well fortified both by art and nature), but were far from the Zidonians, who therefore could not come in to their assistance, nor help to defend them from the danger which, by debauching their manners, they had helped to bring

them into. And, lastly, they had no business with any man, which bespeaks either the idleness they affected (they followed no trade, and so grew lazy and luxurious, and utterly unable to defend themselves) or the independency they affected: they scorned to be either in subjection to or alliance with any of their neighbours, and so they had none to protect them nor bring in any aid to them. They cared for nobody and therefore nobody cared for them. Such as these were the men of Laish.

11. The encouragement which they consequently gave to their countrymen that sent them to prosecute their design upon this city, r. 8—10. Probably the Danites had formed notions of the insuperable difficulties of the enterprise, thought it impossible ever to make themselves masters of Laish, and therefore had kept themselves so long out of the possession of it, perhaps suggesting likewise to one another, in their unbelief, that it was not a country worth going so far and running such a risk for, which jealousies the spies (and they were not, in this, evil spies) had an eye to in their report. 1. They represent the place as desirable: "If you will trust our judgments, we have seen the land, and we are agreed in our verdict upon the view, that, behold, it is very good (v. 9), better than this mountainous country into which we are here crowded by the Philistines. You need not doubt of living comfortably in it, for it is a place where there is no want of any thing," v. 10. See what a good land Canaan was, that this city which lay furthest of all northward, in the utmost corner of the country, stood on such a fruitful spot. 2. They represent it as attainable. They do not at all question but, with God's blessing, they may soon get possession of it; for the people are secure, r. 10. And the more secure always the less safe. "God has given it into your hands, and you may have it for the taking." They stir them up to the undertaking: "Arise, that we may go up against them, let us go about it speedily and resolutely." They expostulate with them for their delays, and chide them out of their sluggishness: "Are you still? Be not slothful to go. Men need to be thus stirred up to mind even their interest. Heaven is a very good land, where there is no want of any thing; our God has, by the promise, given it into our hands; let us not then be slothful in making it sure, and laying hold on eternal life, but strive to enter."

III. The Danites' expedition against Laish. This particular family of them, to whose lot that city fell, now at length make towards it, r. 11—13. The military men were but 600 in all, not a hundredth part of that tribe, for when they entered Canaan the Danites were above 64,000, Num. xxvi. 43. It was strange that none of their brethren of their own tribe, much less of any other, came in to their assistance; but it was



long after Israel came to Canaan before there appeared among them any thing of a public spirit, or concern for a common interest, which was the reason why they seldom united in a common head, and this kept them low and inconsiderable. It appears (by *v.* 21) that these 600 were the whole number that went to settle there, for they had their families and effects with them, their *little ones and cattle*, so confident were they of success. The other tribes gave them a free passage through their country. Their first day's march brought them to Kirjath-jearim (*v.* 12), and such rare things had military encampments now become in Israel that the place where they rested that night was thence called *Mahaneh-dan, the camp of Dan*, and probably the place whence they began their march between Zorah and Esh-taol was called by the same name, and is meant, *ch.* xiii. 25. The second day's march brought them to Mount Ephraim, near Micah's house (*v.* 13), and there we must pause awhile.

14 Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do. 15 And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, *even* unto the house of Micah, and saluted him. 16 And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate. 17 And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, *and* came in thither, *and* took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men *that were* appointed with weapons of war. 18 And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye? 19 And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: *is it* better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? 20 And the priest's

heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people. 21 So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them. 22 *And* when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that *were* in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan. 23 And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company? 24 And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what *is* this *that* ye say unto me, What aileth thee? 25 And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household. 26 And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they *were* too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

The Danites had sent out their spies to find out a country for them, and they sped well in their search; but here, now that they came to the place (for till this brought it to their mind it does not appear that they had mentioned it to their brethren), they oblige them with a further discovery—they can tell them where there are gods: "Here, *in these houses*, there are an ephod, and teraphim, and a great many fine things for devotion, such as we have not the like in our country; *now therefore consider what you have to do, v.* 14. We consulted them, and had a good answer from them; they are worth having, nay, they are worth stealing (that is, having upon the worst terms), and, if we can but make ourselves masters of these gods, we may the better hope to prosper, and make ourselves masters of Laish." So far they were in the right, that it was desirable to have God's presence with them, but wretchedly mistaken when they took these images (which were fitter to be used in a puppet-play than in acts of devotion) for tokens of God's presence. They thought an oracle would be pretty company for them in their enterprise, and instead of a council of war to consult upon every emergency; and, the place they were going to settle in being so far from Shiloh, they thought they had

more need of a *house of gods* among themselves than Micah had that lived so near to it. They might have made as good an ephod and teraphim themselves as these were, and such as would have served their purpose every whit as well; but the reputation which they found them in possession of (though they had had that reputation but a while) amused them into a strange veneration for this *house of gods*, which they would soon have dropped if they had had so much sense as to enquire into its origin, and examine whether there were any thing divine in its institution. Being determined to take these gods along with them, we are here told how they stole the images, cajoled the priest, and frightened Micah from attempting to rescue them.

I. The five men that knew the house and the avenues to it, and particularly the chapel, went in and fetched out the images, with the ephod, and teraphim, and all the appurtenances, while the 600 kept the priest in talk at the gate, *v. 16—18*. See what little care this sorry priest took of his gods; while he was sauntering at the gate, and gazing at the strangers, his treasure (such as it was) was gone. See how impotent these sorry gods were, that could not keep themselves from being stolen. It is mentioned as the reproach of idols that they *themselves had gone into captivity*, *Isa. xli. 2*. O the selfishness of these Danites! How could they imagine those gods should protect them that could not keep themselves from being stolen? Yet because they went by the name of gods, as if it were not enough that they had with them the presence of the invisible God, nor that they stood in relation to the tabernacle, where there were even visible tokens of his presence, nothing will serve them but they must have *gods to go before them*, not of their own making indeed, but, which was as bad, of their own stealing. Their idolatry began in theft, a proper prologue for such an opera. In order to the breaking of the second commandment, they begin with the eighth, and take their neighbour's goods to make them their gods. The holy God *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*, but the devil loves it. Had these Danites seized the images to deface and abolish them, and the priest to punish him, they would have done like Israelites indeed, and would have appeared jealous for their God as their fathers had done (*Josh. xxii. 16*); but to take them for their own use was such a complicated crime as showed that they neither feared God nor regarded man, but were perfectly lost both to godliness and honesty.

II. They set upon the priest, and flattered him into a good humour, not only to let the gods go, but to go himself along with them; for without him they knew not well how to make use of the gods. Observe, 1. How they tempted him, *v. 19*. They assured him of better preferment with them than what he

now had. It would be more honour and profit to be chaplain to a regiment (for they were no more, though they called themselves a *tribe*) than to be only a domestic chaplain to a private gentleman. Let him go with them, and he shall have more dependants no him, more sacrifices brought to his altar, and more fees for consulting his teraphim, than he had here. 2. How they won him. A little persuasion served: *His heart was glad*, *v. 20*. The proposal took well enough with his rambling fancy, which would never let him stay long at a place, and gratified his covetousness and ambition. He had no reason to say but that he was well off where he was; Micah had not *deceived him, nor changed his wages*. He was not moved with any remorse of conscience for attending on a graven image: had he gone away to Shiloh to minister to the Lord's priests, according to the duty of a Levite, he might have been welcome there (*Deut. xviii. 6*), and his removal would have been commendable; but, instead of this, he takes the images with him, and carries the infection of the idolatry into a whole city. It would have been very unjust and ungrateful to Micah if he had only gone away himself, but it was much more so to take the images along with him, which he knew the heart of Micah was set upon. Yet better could not be expected from a treacherous Levite. What house can be sure of him who has forsaken the house of the Lord? Or what friend will he be true to that has been false to his God? He could not pretend that he was under compulsive force, for he was *glad in his heart to go*. If ten shekels won him (as bishop Hall expresses it), eleven would lose him; for what can hold those that have made shipwreck of a good conscience? *The hireling flees because he is a hireling*. The priest and his gods went in *the midst of the people*. There they placed him, that they might secure him either from going back himself, if his mind should change, or from being fetched back by Micah; or perhaps this post was assigned to him in imitation of the order of Israel's march through the wilderness, in which the ark and the priests went in the midst of their camp.

III. They frightened Micah back when he pursued them to recover his gods. As soon as ever he perceived that his chapel was plundered, and his chaplain had run away from him, he mustered all the forces he could and pursued the robbers, *v. 22*. His neighbours, and perhaps tenants, that used to join with him in his devotions, were forward to help him on this occasion; they got together, and pursued the robbers, who, having their children and cattle before them (*v. 21*), could make no great haste, so that they soon overtook them, hoping by strength of reason to recover what was stolen, for the disproportion of their numbers was such that they could not hope to do it by strength of arm. The pursuers called after them, desiring to

speak a word with them; those in the rear (where it is probable they posted the fiercest and strongest of their company, expecting there to be attacked) turned about and asked Micah what ailed him that he was so much concerned, and what he would have, v. 23. He argues with them, and pleads his right, which he thought should prevail; but they, in answer, plead their might, which, it proved, did prevail; for it is common that might overcomes right.

1. He insists upon the wrong they had certainly done him (v. 24): "*You have taken away my gods, my images of God, which I have an incontestable title to, for I made them myself, and which I have such an affection for that I am undone if I lose them; for what have I more that will do me any good if these he lost?*" Now, (1.) This discovers to us the folly of idolaters, and the power that Satan has over them. What a folly was it for him to call those his *gods* which he had made, when he only that made us is to be worshipped by us as a God! Folly indeed to set his heart upon such silly idle things, and to look upon himself as undone when he had lost them! (2.) This may discover to us our spiritual idolatry. That creature which we place our happiness in, which we set our affections inordinately upon, and which we can by no means find in our hearts to part with, of which we say, "*What have we more?*" *that we make an idol of.* That is put in God's place, and is a usurper, which we are concerned about as if our life and comfort, our hope and happiness, and our all, were bound up in it. But, (3.) If all people will thus walk in the name of their god, shall we not be in like manner affected towards our God, the true God? Let us reckon the having of an interest in God and communion with him incomparably the richest portion, and the loss of God the sorest loss. Woe unto us if he depart, for what have we more? Deserted souls that are lamenting after the Lord may well wonder, as Micah did, that you should ask what ails them; for the tokens of God's favour are suspended, his comforts are withdrawn, and what have they more?

2. They insist upon the mischief they would certainly do him if he prosecuted his demand. They would not hear reason, nor do justice, nor so much as offer to pay him the prime cost he had been at upon those images, nor promise to make restitution of what they had taken when they had served their present purpose with them in this expedition and had time to copy them and make others like them for themselves: much less had they any compassion for a loss he so bitterly lamented. They would not so much as give him good words, but resolved to justify their robbery with murder if he did not immediately let fall his claims, v. 25. "*Take heed lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, and that is worse than*

*losing thy gods.*" Wicked and unreasonable men reckon it a great provocation to be asked to do justice, and support themselves by their power against right and reason. Micah's crime is asking his own, yet, for this, he is in danger of losing his life and the lives of his household. Micah has not courage enough to venture his life for the rescue of his gods, so little opinion has he of their being able to protect him and bear him out, and therefore tamely gives them up (v. 26): "*He turned and went back to his house;* and if the loss of his idols did but convince him (as, one would think, it should) of their vanity and impotency, and his own folly in setting his heart upon them, and send him back to the true God from whom he had revolted, he that lost them had a much better bargain than those that by force of arms carried them off. If the loss of our idols cure us of the love of them, and make us say, "*What have we to do any more with idols?*" the loss will be unspeakable gain. See Isa. ii. 20; xxx. 22.

27 And they took *the things* which Micah had made, and came unto Laish, unto a people *that were* at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. 28 And *there was* no deliverer, because it *was* far from Zidon, and they had no business with *any* man; and it was in the valley that *lieth* by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein. 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city *was* Laish at the first. 30 And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Here is, I. Laish conquered by the Danites. They proceeded on their march, and, because they met with no disaster, perhaps concluded they had not done amiss in robbing Micah. Many justify themselves in their impiety by their prosperity. Observe, 1. What posture they found the people of Laish in, both those of the city and those of the country about. They were quiet and secure, not jealous of the five spies that had been among them to search out the land, nor

had they any intelligence of the approach of this enemy, which made them a very easy prey to this little handful of men that came upon them, v. 27. Note, Many are brought to destruction by their security. Satan gets advantage against us when we are careless and off our watch. Happy therefore is the man that feareth always. 2. What a complete victory they obtained over them: They put all the people to the sword, and burnt down so much of the city as they thought fit to rebuild (v. 27, 28), and, for aught that appears, herein they met with no resistance; for the measure of the iniquity of the Canaanites was full, that of the Danites was but beginning to fill. 3. How the conquerors settled themselves in their room, v. 28, 29. They built the city, or much of it, anew (the old buildings having gone to decay), and called the name of it Dan, to be a witness for them that, though separated so far off from their brethren, they were nevertheless Danites by birth, which might hereafter, by reason of their distance, be called in question. We should feel concerned not to lose the privilege of our relation to God's Israel, and therefore should take all occasions to own it and preserve the remembrance of it to ours after us.

II. Idolatry immediately set up there. God had graciously performed his promise, in putting them in possession of that which fell to their lot, obliging them thereby to be faithful to him who had been so to them. They inherited the labour of the people, that they might observe his statutes, Ps. cv. 44, 45. But the first thing they do after they are settled is to break his statutes. As soon as they began to settle themselves they set up the groven image (v. 30), perversely attributing their success to that idol which, if God had not been infinitely patient, would have been their ruin. Thus a prosperous idolater goes on to offend, imputing this his power unto his god, Hab. i. 11. Their Levite, who officiated as priest, is at length named here—Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh. The word Manasseh, in the original, has the letter *n*, set over the head, which, some of the Jewish rabbin say, is an intimation that it should be left out, and then Manasseh will be Moses, and this Levite, they say, was grandson to the famous Moses, who indeed had a son named Gershom; but, say they, the historian, in honour of Moses, by a half interposition of that letter, turned the name into Manasseh. The vulgar Latin reads it Moses. And if indeed Moses had a grandson that was rakish, and was picked up as a fit tool to be made use of in the setting up of idolatry, it is not the only instance (would to God it were!) of the unhappy degenerating of the posterity of great and good men. Children's children are not always the crown of old men. But the learned bishop Patrick takes this to be an idle conceit of the rabbin, and supposes this Jonathan to be of some

other family of the Levites. How long these corruptions continued we are told in the close. 1. That the posterity of this Jonathan continued to act as priests to this family of Dan that was seated at Laish, and in the country about, till the captivity, v. 30. After Micah's image was removed this family retained the character of priests, and had respect paid them as such by that city, and it is very probable that Jeroboam had an eye to them when he set up one of his calves there (which they would welcome at Dan, and put some reputation upon, when the priests of the Lord would have nothing to do with them), and that this family officiated as some of his priests. 2. That these images continued till Samuel's time, for so long the ark of God was at Shiloh; and it is probable that in his time effectual care was taken to suppress and abolish this idolatry. See how dangerous it is to admit an infection, for spiritual distempers are not so soon cured as caught.

## CHAP. XIX.

The three remaining chapters of this book contain a most tragical story of the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, patronised by the tribe of Benjamin, for which that tribe was severely chastised and almost entirely cut off by the rest of the tribes. This seems to have been done not long after the death of Joshua, for it was when there was no king, no judge, in Israel (ver. 1, and ch. xxi. 25), and Phinehas was then high priest, ch. xx. 28. These particular iniquities, the Danites' idolatry, and the Benjaminites' immorality, let in that general apostasy, ch. iii. 7. The abuse of the Levite's concubine is here very particularly related. I. Her adulterous elopement from him, ver. 1, 2. II. His reconciliation to her, and the journey he took to fetch her home, ver. 3. III. Her father's kind entertainment of him, ver. 4-9. IV. That he met with at Gibeah, where, being beighted, he was forced to stop. 1. He was neglected by the men of Gibeah (ver. 10-15) and entertained by an Ephraimite that sojourned among them, ver. 16-21. 2. They set upon him in his quarters, as the Sodomites did on Lot's guests, ver. 22-24. 3. They villainously forced his concubine to death, ver. 25-28. V. The course he took to send notice of this to all the tribes of Israel, ver. 29, 30.

AND it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah. 2 And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months. 3 And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him. 4 And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there. 5 And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the dam-

sel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way. 6 And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry. 7 And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again. 8 And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them. 9 And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home. 10 But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and *there were* with him two asses saddled, his concubine also *was* with him. 11 *And* when they *were* by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. 12 And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah. 13 And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah. 14 And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them *when they were* by Gibeah, which *belongeth* to Benjamin. 15 And they turned aside thither, to go in *and* to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for *there was* no man that took them into his house to lodging.

The domestic affairs of this Levite would not have been related thus largely but to make way for the following story of the injuries done him, in which the whole nation interested themselves. Bishop Hall's first remark upon this story is, *That there is no complaint of a public ordered state but there is a Levite at one end of it, either as an agent or as a patient.* In Micah's idolatry a Levite was active; in the wickedness of Gibeah a Levite was passive; *no tribe shall sooner feel the want of government than that of Levi;* and, in all the book of Judges, no mention is made of any of that tribe, but of these two. This Levite was of Mount Ephraim, v. 1. He married a wife of Bethlehem-Judah. She is called his *concubine*, because she was not endowed, for perhaps he had nothing to endow her with, being himself a sojourner and not settled; but it does not appear that he had any other wife, and the margin calls her *a wife, a concubine*, v. 1. She came from the same city that Micah's Levite came from, as if Bethlehem-Judah owed a double ill turn to Mount Ephraim, for she was as bad for a Levite's wife as the other for a Levite.

I. This Levite's concubine played the whore and eloped from her husband, v. 2. The Chaldee reads it only that she *carried herself insolently to him, or despised him*, and, he being displeased at it, *she went away from him*, and (which was not fair) was received and entertained at her father's house. Had her husband turned her out of doors unjustly, her father ought to have pitied her affliction; but, when she treacherously departed from her husband to embrace the bosom of a stranger, her father ought not to have countenanced her sin. Perhaps she would not have violated her duty to her husband if she had not known too well where she should be kindly received. Children's ruin is often owing very much to parents' indulgence.

II. The Levite went himself to court her return. It was a sign there was no king, no judge, in Israel, else she would have been prosecuted and put to death as an adulteress; but, instead of that, she is addressed in the kindest manner by her injured husband, who takes a long journey on purpose to beseech her to be reconciled, v. 3. If he had put her away, it would have been a crime in him to return to her again, Jer. iii. 1. But, she having gone away, it was a virtue in him to forgive the offence, and, though the party wronged, to make the first motion to her to be friends again. It is part of the character of the wisdom from above that it is gentle and easy to be entreated. He spoke *friendly* to her, or *comfortably* (for so the Hebrew phrase of *speaking to the heart* commonly signifies), which intimates that she was in sorrow, penitent for what she had done amiss, which probably he heard of when he came to fetch her back. Thus God promises concerning adulterous Israel (Hos. ii. 14), *I will*

bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her.

III. Her father made him very welcome, and, by his extraordinary kindness to him, endeavoured to atone for the countenance he had given his daughter in withdrawing from him, and to confirm him in his disposition to be reconciled to her. 1. He entertains him kindly, rejoices to see him (v. 3), treats him generously for three days, v. 4. And the Levite, to show that he was perfectly reconciled, accepted his kindness, and we do not find that he upbraided him or his daughter with what had been amiss, but was as easy and as pleasant as at his first wedding-feast. It becomes all, but especially Levites, to forgive as God does. Every thing among them gave a hopeful prospect of their living comfortably together for the future; but, could they have foreseen what befel them within one day or two, how would all their mirth have been embittered and turned into mourning! When the affairs of our families are in the best posture we ought to rejoice with trembling, because we know not what troubles one day may bring forth. We cannot foresee what evil is near us, but we ought to consider what may be, that we may not be secure, as if to-morrow must needs be as this day and much more abundant, Isa. lvi. 12. 2. He is very earnest for his stay, as a further demonstration of his hearty welcome. The affection he had for him, and the pleasure he took in his company, proceeded, (1.) From a civil regard to him as his son-in-law and an ingrafted branch of his own house. Note, Love and duty are due to those to whom we are related by marriage as well as to those who are bone of our bone: and those that show kindness as this Levite did may expect to receive kindness as he did. And, (2.) From a pious respect to him as a Levite, a servant of God's house; if he was such a Levite as he should be (and nothing appears to the contrary) he is to be commended for courting his stay, finding his conversation profitable, and having opportunity to learn from him the good knowledge of the Lord, hoping also that the Lord will do him good because he has a Levite to be his son-in-law, and will bless him for his sake. [1.] He forces him to stay the fourth day, and this was kind; not knowing when they might be together again, he engages him to stay as long as he possibly could. The Levite, though nobly treated, was very urgent to be gone. A good man's heart is where his business is; for as a bird that wanders from her nest so is the man that wanders from his place. It is a sign a man has either little to do at home, or little heart to do what he has to do, when he can take pleasure in being long abroad where he has nothing to do. It is especially good to see a Levite willing to go home to his few sheep in the wilderness. Yet this Levite was overcome by importunity and kind persuasion to stay longer than he

intended, v. 5—7. We ought to avoid the extreme of an over-easy yielding, to the neglect of our duty on the one hand, and that of moroseness and wilfulness, to the neglect of our friends and their kindness on the other hand. Our Saviour, after his resurrection, was prevailed upon to stay with his friends longer than he at first intimated to be his purpose, Luke xxiv. 28, 29. [2.] He forces him to stay till the afternoon of the fifth day, and this, as it proved, was unkind, v. 8, 9. He would by no means let him go before dinner, promises him he shall have dinner early, designing thereby, as he had done the day before, to detain him another night; but the Levite was intent on the house of the Lord at Shiloh (v. 18), and, being impatient to get thither, would stay no longer. Had they set out early, they might have reached some better lodging-place than that which they were now constrained to take up with, nay, they might have got to Shiloh. Note, Our friends' designed kindnesses often prove, in the event, real injuries; what is meant for our welfare becomes a trap. *Who knows what is good for a man in this life?* The Levite was unwise in setting out so late; he might have got home better if he had staid a night longer and taken the day before him.

IV. In his return home he was forced to lodge at Gibeah, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, afterwards called *Gibeah of Saul*, which lay on his road towards Shiloh and Mount Ephraim. When it drew towards night, and the shadows of the evening were stretched out, they began to think (as it behoves us to do when we observe the day of our life hastening towards a period) where they must lodge. When night came they could not pursue their journey. *He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goes.* They could not but desire rest, for which the night was intended, as the day for labour. 1. The servant proposed that they should lodge in Jebus, afterwards Jerusalem, but as yet in the possession of Jebusites. "Come," said the servant, "let us lodge in this city of the Jebusites," v. 11. And, if they had done so, it is probable they would have had much better usage than they met with in Gibeah of Benjamin. Debauched and profligate Israelites are worse and much more dangerous than Canaanites themselves. But the master, as became one of God's tribe, would by no means quarter, no, not one night, in a city of strangers (v. 12), not because he questioned his safety among them, but he was not willing, if he could possibly avoid it, to have so much intimacy and familiarity with them as a night's lodging came to, nor to be so much beholden to them. By shunning this place he would witness against the wickedness of those that contracted friendship and familiarity with these devoted nations. Let Israelites, Levites especially, associate with Israelites, and not with the sons of the stranger.

2. Having passed by Jebus, which was about five or six miles from Bethlehem (the place whence they came), and not having daylight to bring them to Ramah, they stopped at Gibeah (v. 13—15); there they sat down in the street, nobody offering them a lodging. In these countries, at that time, there were no inns, or public-houses, in which, as with us, travellers might have entertainment for their money, but they carried entertainment along with them, as this Levite did (v. 19), and depended upon the courtesy and hospitality of the inhabitants for a lodging. Let us take occasion hence, when we are in journeys, to thank God for this, among other conveniences of travelling, that there are inns to entertain strangers, and in which they may be welcome and well accommodated for their money. Surely there is no country in the world wherein one may stay at home with more satisfaction, or go abroad with more comfort, than in our own nation. This traveller, though a Levite (and to those of that tribe God had particularly commanded his people to be kind upon all occasions), met with very cold entertainment at Gibeah: *No man took them into his house.* If they had any reason to think he was a Levite perhaps that made those ill-disposed people the more shy of him. There are those who will have this laid to their charge at the great day, *I was a stranger and you took me not in.*

16 And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which *was* also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place *were* Benjamites. 17 And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou? 18 And he said unto him, We *are* passing from Beth-lehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence *am* I: and I went to Beth-lehem-judah, but I *am now* going to the house of the LORD; and there *is* no man that receiveth me to house. 19 Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man *which is* with thy servants: *there is* no want of any thing. 20 And the old man said, Peace *be* with thee; howsoever *let* all thy wants *lie* upon me; only lodge not in the street. 21 So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses:

and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.

Though there was not one of Gibeah, yet it proved there was one in Gibeah, that showed some civility to this distressed Levite, who was glad that any one took notice of him. It was strange that some of those wicked people, who, when it was dark, designed so ill to him and his concubine, did not, under pretence of kindness, invite them in, that they might have a fairer opportunity of perpetrating their villany; but either they had not wit enough to be so designing, or not wickedness enough to be so deceiving. Or, perhaps, none of them separately thought of such a wickedness, till in the black and dark night they got together to contrive what mischief they should do. Bad people in confederacy make one another much worse than any of them would be by themselves. When the Levite, and his wife, and servant, were beginning to fear that they must lie in the street all night (and as good have laid in a den of lions) they were at length invited into a house, and we are here told,

I. Who that kind man was that invited them. 1. He was a man of Mount Ephraim, and only sojourned in Gibeah, v. 16. Of all the tribes of Israel, the Benjamites had most reason to be kind to poor travellers, for their ancestor, Benjamin, was born upon the road, his mother being then upon a journey, and very near to this place, Gen. xxxv. 16, 17. Yet they were hard-hearted to a traveller in distress, while an honest Ephraimite had compassion on him, and, no doubt, was the more kind to him, when, upon enquiry, he found that he was his countryman, of Mount Ephraim likewise. He that was himself but a sojourner in Gibeah was the more compassionate to a wayfaring man, for he *knew the heart of a stranger*, Exod. xxiii. 9; Deut. x. 19. Good people, that look upon themselves but as strangers and sojourners in this world, should for this reason be tender to one another, because they all belong to the same better country and are not at home here. 2. He was an old man, one that retained some of the expiring virtue of an Israelite. The rising generation was entirely corrupted; if there was any good remaining among them, it was only with those that were old and going off. 3. He was coming home from his work out of the field at eventide. The evening calls home labourers, Ps. civ. 23. But, it should seem, this was the only labourer that this evening brought home to Gibeah. The rest had given themselves up to sloth and luxury, and no marvel there was among them, as in Sodom, abundance of uncleanness, when there was among them, as in Sodom, abundance of idleness, Ezek. xvi. 49. But he that was honestly diligent in his business all day was disposed to be generously hospitable to these poor strangers at night. Let men labour, that they may have to give,

Eph. iv. 28. It appears from v. 21 that he was a man of some substance, and yet had been himself at work in the field. No man's estate will privilege him in idleness.

II. How free and generous he was in his invitation. He did not stay till they applied to him to beg for a night's lodging; but when he saw them (v. 17) enquired into their circumstances, and anticipated them with his kindness. Thus our good God answers before we call. Note, A charitable disposition expects only opportunity, not importunity, to do good, and will succour upon sight, unsought unto. Hence we read of a *bountiful eye*, Prov. xxii. 9. If Gibeah was like Sodom, this old man was like Lot in Sodom, who *sat in the gate* to invite strangers, Gen. xix. 1. Thus *Job opened his doors to the traveller*, and would not suffer him to lodge in the street, Job xxxi. 32. Observe, 1. How ready he was to give credit to the Levite's account of himself when he saw no reason at all to question the truth of it. Charity is not apt to distrust, but *hopeth all things* (1 Cor. xiii. 7) and will not make use of Nabal's excuse for his churlishness to David, *Many servants now-a-days break away from their masters*, 1 Sam. xxv. 10. The Levite, in his account of himself, professed that he was now going to the house of the Lord (v. 18), for there he designed to attend, either with a trespass-offering for the sins of his family, or with a peace-offering for the mercies of his family, or both, before he went to his own house. And, if the men of Gibeah had any intimation of his being bound that way, probably they would therefore be disinclined to entertain him. The Samaritans would not receive Christ because his face was towards Jerusalem, Luke ix. 53. But for this reason, because he was a Levite and was now going to the house of the Lord, this good old man was the more kind to him. Thus he received a disciple in the name of a disciple, a servant of God for his Master's sake. 2. How free he was to give him entertainment. The Levite was himself provided with all necessaries (v. 19), wanted nothing but a lodging, but his generous host would be himself at the charge of his entertainment (v. 20): *Let all thy wants be upon me*; so he brought him into his house, v. 21. Thus God will, some way or other, raise up friends for his people and ministers, even when they seem forlorn.

22 Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him. 23 And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said

unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. 24 Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing. 25 But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go. 26 Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light. 27 And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. 28 And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place. 29 And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coast of Israel. 30 And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

Here is, I. The great wickedness of the men of Gibeah. One could not imagine that ever it should enter into the heart of men that had the use of human reason, of Israelites that had the benefit of divine revelation, to be so very wicked. "Lord, what is man?" said David, "what a mean creature is he!" "Lord, what is man," may we say upon the reading of this story, "what a vile creature is he, when he is given up to his own heart's lusts!" The sinners are here called *sons of Belial*, that is, ungovernable men, men that would endure no yoke, child-



ren of the devil (for he is Belial), resembling him, and joining with him in rebellion against God and his government. Sons of Benjamin, of whom Moses had said, *The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him* (Deut. xxxiii. 12), have become such sons of Belial that an honest man cannot lodge in safety among them. The sufferers were a Levite and his wife, and that kind man that gave them entertainment. We are strangers upon earth, and must expect strange usage. It is said *they were making their hearts merry* when this trouble came upon them, *v. 22*. If the mirth was innocent, it teaches us of what uncertain continuance all our creature comforts and enjoyments are; when we are ever so well pleased with our friends, we know not how near our enemies are; nor, if it be well with us this hour, can we be sure it will be so the next. If the mirth was sinful and excessive, let it be a warning to us to keep a strict guard upon ourselves, that we grow not intemperate in the use of lawful things, nor be transported into indecencies by our cheerfulness; for *the end of that mirth is heaviness*. God can soon change the note of those that are making their hearts merry, and turn their laughter into mourning and their joy into heaviness. Let us see what the wickedness of these Benjamites was.

1. They made a rude and insolent assault, in the night, upon the habitation of an honest man, that not only lived peaceably among them, but kept a good house and was a blessing and ornament to their city. They beset the house round, and, to the great terror of those within, beat as hard as they could at the door, *v. 22*. A man's house is his castle, in which he ought to be both safe and quiet, and, where there is law, it is taken under the special protection of it; but there was no king in Israel to keep the peace and secure honest men from the sons of violence.

2. They had a particular spite at the strangers that were within their gates, that only desired a night's lodging among them, contrary to the laws of hospitality, which all civilized nations have accounted sacred, and which the master of the house pleaded with them (*v. 23*): *Seeing that this man has come into my house*. Those are base and abject spirits indeed that will trample upon the helpless, and use a man the worse for his being a stranger, whom they know no ill of.

3. They designed in the most filthy and abominable manner (not to be thought of without horror and detestation) to abuse the Levite, whom perhaps they had observed to be young and comely: *Bring him forth that we may know him*. We should certainly have concluded they meant only to enquire whence he came, and to know his character, but that the good man of the house, who understood their meaning too well, by his answer lets us know that they designed the

gratification of that most unnatural and worse than brutish lust which was expressly forbidden by the law of Moses, and called an *abomination*, Lev. xviii. 22. Those that are guilty of it are ranked in the New Testament among the worst and vilest of sinners (1 Tim. i. 10), and such as *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 9. Now, (1.) This was the sin of Sodom, and is thence called *Sodomity*. The Dead Sea, which was the standing monument of God's vengeance upon Sodom, for its filthiness, was one of the boundaries of Canaan, and lay not many miles off from Gibeah. We may suppose the men of Gibeah had seen it many a time, and yet would not take warning by it, but did worse than Sodom (Ezek. xvi. 48), and sinned just *after the similitude of their transgression*. Who would have expected (says bishop Hall) such extreme abomination to come out of the loins of Jacob? Even the worst pagans were saints to them. What did it avail them that they had the ark of God in Shiloh when they had Sodom in their streets—God's law in their fringes, but the devil in their hearts? Nothing but hell itself can yield a worse creature than a depraved Israelite. (2.) This was the punishment of their idolatry, that sin to which they were, above all others, most addicted. Because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, therefore he gave them up to these vile affections, by which they dishonoured themselves as they had by their idolatry dishonoured him and turned his glory into shame, Rom. i. 24, 28. See and admire, in this instance, the patience of God. Why were not these sons of Belial struck blind, as the Sodomites were? Why were not fire and brimstone rained from heaven upon their city? It was because God would leave it to Israel to punish them by the sword, and would reserve his own punishment of them for the future state, in which those that *go after strange flesh shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire*, Jude 7.

4. They were deaf to the reproofs and reasonings of the good man of the house, who, being well acquainted (we may suppose) with the story of Lot and the Sodomites, set himself to imitate Lot, *v. 23, 24*. Compare Gen. xix. 6—8. He went out to them as Lot did, spoke civilly to them, called them brethren, begged of them to desist, pleaded the protection of his house which his guests were under, and represented to them the great wickedness of their attempt: "Do not so wickedly, so very wickedly." He calls it *folly* and a *vile thing*. But in one thing he conformed too far to Lot's example (as we are apt in imitating good men to follow them even in their false steps), in offering them his daughter to do what they would with. He had not power thus to prostitute his daughter, nor ought he to have done this evil that good might come. But this wicked proposal of his may be in

part excused from the great surprise and terror he was in, his concern for his guests, and his having too close a regard to what Lot did in the like case, especially not finding that the angels who were by reproved him for it. And perhaps he hoped that his mentioning this as a more natural gratification of their lust would have sent them back to their common harlots. But *they would not hearken to him*, r. 25. Headstrong lusts are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; they sear the conscience and make it insensible.

5. They got the Levite's wife among them, and abused her to death, r. 25. They slighted the old man's offer of his daughter to their lust, either because she was not handsome or because they knew her to be one of great gravity and modesty: but, when the Levite brought them his concubine, they took her with them by force to the place appointed for their filthiness. Josephus, in his narrative of this story, makes her to be the person they had a design upon when they beset the house, and says nothing of their villanous design upon the Levite himself. They saw her (he says) in the street, when they came into the town, and were smitten with her beauty; and perhaps, though she was reconciled to her husband, her looks did not bespeak her to be one of the most modest. Many bring mischief of this kind upon themselves by their loose carriage and behaviour; a little spark may kindle a great fire. One would think the Levite should have followed them, to see what became of his wife, but it is probable he durst not, lest they should do him a mischief. In the miserable end of this woman, we may see the righteous hand of God punishing her for her former uncleanness, when she played the whore against her husband, r. 2. Though her father had countenanced her, her husband had forgiven her, and the fault was forgotten now that the quarrel was made up, yet God remembered it against her when he suffered these wicked men thus wretchedly to abuse her; how unrighteous soever they were in their treatment of her, in permitting it the Lord was righteous. Her punishment answered her sin, *Culpa libido fuit, pœna libido fuit—Lust was her sin, and lust was her punishment*. By the law of Moses she was to have been put to death for her adultery. She escaped that punishment from men, yet vengeance pursued her; for, if there was no king in Israel, yet there was a God in Israel, a God that judgeth in the earth. We must not think it enough to make our peace with men, whom by our sins we have wronged, but are concerned, by repentance and faith, to make our peace with God, who sees not as men see, nor makes so light of sin as men often do. The justice of God in this matter does not at all extenuate the horrid wickedness of these men of Gibeah, than which

nothing could be more barbarous and inhuman.

11. The notice that was sent of this wickedness to all the tribes of Israel. The poor abused woman made towards her husband's lodgings as soon as ever the approach of the day-light obliged these sons of Belial to let her go (for these works of darkness hate and dread the light), r. 25. Down she fell at the door, with her hands on the threshold, begging pardon (as it were) for her former transgression, and in that posture of a penitent, with her mouth in the dust, she expired. There he found her (r. 26, 27), supposed her asleep, or overcome with shame and confusion for what had happened, but soon perceived she was dead (r. 28), took up her dead body, which, we may suppose, had all over it marks of the hands, the blows, and other abuses, she had received. On this sad occasion he waived his purpose of going to Shiloh, and went directly home. He that went out in hopes to return rejoicing came in again melancholy and disconsolate, sat down and considered, "Is this an injury fit to be passed by?" He cannot call for fire from heaven to consume the men of Gibeah, as those angels did who were, after the same manner, insulted by the Sodomites. There was no king in Israel, nor (for aught that appears) any sanhedrim, or great council, to appeal to, and demand justice from. Phinehas is high priest, but he attends closely to the business of the sanctuary, and will be no judge or divider. He has therefore no other way left him than to appeal to the people: let the community be judge. Though they had no general stated assembly of all the tribes, yet it is probable that each tribe had a meeting of their chiefs within itself. To each of the tribes, in their respective meetings, he sent by special messengers a remonstrance of the wrong that was done him, in all its aggravating circumstances, and with it a piece of his wife's dead body (r. 29), both to confirm the truth of the story and to affect them the more with it. He divided it into twelve pieces, *according to the bones*, so some read it, that is, by the joints, sending one to each tribe, even to Benjamin among the rest, with the hope that some among them would be moved to join in punishing so great a villany, and the more warmly because committed by some of their own tribe. It did indeed look very barbarous thus to mangle a dead body, which, having been so wretchedly dishonoured, ought to have been decently interred; but the Levite designed hereby, not only to represent their barbarous usage of his wife, whom they had better have cut in pieces than have used as they did, but also to express his own passionate concern and thereby to excite the like in them. And it had the desired effect. All that saw the pieces of the dead body, and were told how the matter was, expressed the same sentiments upon it. 1. That the men of

Gibeah had been guilty of a very heinous piece of wickedness, the like to which had never been known before in Israel, *v.* 30. It was a complicated crime, loaded and blackened with all possible aggravations. They were not such fools as to make a mock at this sin, or turn the story off with a jest. 2. That a general assembly of all Israel should be called, to debate what was fit to be done for the punishment of this wickedness, that a stop might be put to this threatening inundation of debauchery, and the wrath of God might not be poured upon the whole nation for it. It is not a common case, and therefore they stir up one another to come together upon the occasion with this: *Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.* We have here the three great rules by which those that sit in council ought to go in every arduous affair. (1.) Let every man retire into himself, and weigh the matter impartially and fully in his own thoughts, and seriously and calmly consider it, without prejudice on either side, before he speaks upon it. (2.) Let them freely talk it over, and every man take advice of his friend, know his opinion and his reasons, and weigh them. (3.) Then let every man speak his mind, and give his vote according to his conscience. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety.

## CHAP. XX.

Into the book of the wars of the Lord the story of this chapter must be brought, but it looks as sad and uncomfortable as any article in all that history; for there is nothing in it that looks in the least bright or pleasant but the pious zeal of Israel against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, which made it on their side a just and holy war; but otherwise the obstinacy of the Benjamites in protecting their criminals, which was the foundation of the war, the vast loss which the Israelites sustained in carrying on the war, and (though the righteous cause was victorious at last) the issuing of the war in the almost utter extirpation of the tribe of Benjamin, make it, from first to last, melancholy. And yet this happened soon after the glorious settlement of Israel in the land of promise, upon which one would have expected every thing to be prosperous and serene. In this chapter we have, I. The Levite's case heard in a general convention of the tribes, *ver.* 1—7. II. A unanimous resolve to avenge his quarrel upon the men of Gibeah, *ver.* 8—11. III. The Benjamites appearing in defence of the criminals, *ver.* 12—17. IV. The defeat of Israel in the first and second day's battle, *ver.* 18—25. V. Their humbling themselves before God upon that occasion, *ver.* 26—28. VI. The total rout they gave the Benjamites in the third engagement, by a stratagem, by which they were all cut off, except 600 men, *ver.* 29—48. And all this the effect of the indignities done to one poor Levite and his wife; so little do those that do inquiry consider what will be the end thereof.

**T**HEN all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh. 2 And the chief of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword. 3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness? 4 And

the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah, that *belongeth* to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. 5 And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. 6 And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel. 7 Behold, ye *are* all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel. 8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house. 9 But now this *shall be* the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* by lot against it; 10 And we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel. 11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

Here is, I. A general meeting of all the congregation of Israel to examine the matter concerning the Levite's concubine, and to consider what was to be done upon it, *v.* 1, 2. It does not appear that they were summoned by the authority of any one common head, but they came together by the consent and agreement, as it were, of one common heart, fired with a holy zeal for the honour of God and Israel. 1. The place of their meeting was *Mizpeh*; they gathered together unto the Lord there, for Mizpeh was so very near to Shiloh that their encampment might very well be supposed to reach from Mizpeh to Shiloh. Shiloh was a small town, and therefore, when there was a general meeting of the people to present themselves before God, they chose Mizpeh for their head-quarters, which was the next adjoining city of note, perhaps because they were not willing to give that trouble to Shiloh which so great an assembly would occasion, it being the residence of the priests that attended the tabernacle. 2. The persons that met were all Israel, from Dan (the city very lately so called, *ch.* xviii. 29) in the north to Beersheba in the south, with the

land of Gilead (that is, the tribes on the other side Jordan), all *as one man*, so unanimous were they in their concern for the public good. Here was an assembly of the people of God, not a convocation of the Levites and priests, though a Levite was the person principally concerned in the cause, out an assembly of the people, to whom the Levite referred himself with an *Appello populum*—*I appeal to the people*. The *people of God* were 400,000 *footmen that drew sword*, that is, were armed and disciplined, and fit for service, and some of them perhaps such as had *known the wars of Canaan*, *ch. iii. 1*. In this assembly of all Israel, the chief (or corners) of the people (for rulers are the corner-stones of the people, that keep all together) presented themselves as the representatives of the rest. They rendered themselves at their respective posts, at the head of the thousands and hundreds, the fifties and tens, over which they presided; for so much order and government, we may suppose, at least, they had among them, though they had no general or commander-in-chief. So that here was, (1.) A general congress of the states for counsel. The chief of the people presented themselves, to lead and direct in this affair. (2.) A general rendezvous of the militia for action, all that drew sword and were men of war (*v. 17*), not hirelings nor pressed men, but the best freeholders, that went at their own charge. Israel were above 600,000 when they came into Canaan, and we have reason to think they were at this time much increased, rather than diminished; but then all between twenty and sixty were military men, now we may suppose more than the one half exempted from hearing arms to cultivate the land; so that these were as the trained bands. The militia of the two tribes and a half were 40,000 (*Josh. iv. 13*), but the tribes were many more.

II. Notice given to the tribe of Benjamin of this meeting (*v. 3*): *They heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpeh*. Probably they had a legal summons sent them to appear with their brethren, that the cause might be fairly debated, before any resolutions were taken up upon it, and so the mischiefs that followed would have been happily prevented; but the notice they had of this meeting rather hardened and exasperated them than awakened them to think of the things that belonged to their peace and honour.

III. A solemn examination of the crime charged upon the men of Gibeah. A very horrid representation of it had been made by the report of the messengers that were sent to call them together, but it was fit it should be more closely enquired into, because such things are often made worse than really they were; a committee therefore was appointed to examine the witnesses (upon oath, no doubt) and to report the matter. It is only the testimony of the Levite himself that is here recorded, but it is probable his servant, and the old man, were examined, and gave

in their testimony, for that more than one were examined appears by the original (*v. 3*), which is, *Tell you us*; and the law was that none should be put to death, much less so many, upon the testimony of one witness only. The Levite gives a particular account of the matter: that he came into Gibeah only as a traveller to lodge there, not giving the least shadow of suspicion that he designed them any ill turn (*v. 4*), and that the men of Gibeah, even those that were of substance among them, that should have been a protection to the stranger within their gates, riotously set upon the house where he lodged, and *thought to slay him*; he could not, for shame relate the demand which they, without shame, made, *ch. xix. 22*. They declared their sin as Sodom, even the sin of Sodom, but his modesty would not suffer him to repeat it; it was sufficient to say they would have slain him, for he would rather have been slain than have submitted to their villany; and, if they had got him into their hands, they would have abused him to death, witness what they had done to his concubine: *They have forced her that she is dead*, *v. 5*. And, to excite in his countrymen an indignation at this wickedness, he had sent pieces of the mangled body to all the tribes, which had fetched them together to bear their testimony against the *lewdness and folly committed in Israel*, *v. 6*. All lewdness is folly, but especially lewdness in Israel. For those to defile their own bodies who have the honourable seal of the covenant in their flesh, for those to defy the divine vengeance to whom it is so clearly revealed from heaven—Nabal is their name, and folly is with them. He concludes his declaration with an appeal to the judgment of the court (*v. 7*): *You are all children of Israel*, and therefore you know law and judgment, *Esth. i. 13*. "You are a holy people to God, and have a dread of every thing which will dishonour God and defile the land; you are of the same community, members of the same body, and therefore likely to feel from the distempers of it; you are children of Israel, that ought to take particular care of the Levites, God's tribe, among you, and therefore give your advice and counsel what is to be done."

IV. The resolution they came to hereupon, which was that, being now together, they would not disperse till they had seen vengeance taken upon this wicked city, which was the reproach and scandal of their nation. Observe, 1. Their zeal against the lewdness that was committed. They would not return to their houses, how much soever their families and their affairs at home wanted them, till they had vindicated the honour of God and Israel, and recovered with their swords, if it could not be had otherwise, that satisfaction for the crime which the justice of the nation called for, *v. 8*. By this they showed themselves children of Israel indeed, that they preferred the public interest before their pri-

vate concerns. 2. Their prudence in sending out a considerable body of their forces to fetch provisions for the rest, *v.* 9, 10. One of ten, and he chosen by lot, 40,000 in all, must go to their respective countries, whence they came, to fetch bread and other necessaries for the subsistence of this great army; for when they came from home they took with them provisions only for a journey to Mizpeh, not for an encampment (which might prove long) before Gibeah. This was to prevent their scattering to forage for themselves, for, if they had done this, it would have been hard to get them all together again, especially all in so good a mind. Note, When there appears in people a pious zeal for any good work it is best to strike while the iron is hot, for such zeal is apt to cool quickly if the prosecution of the work be delayed. Let it never be said that we left that good work to be done to-morrow which we could as well have done to-day. 3. Their unanimity in these counsels, and the execution of them. The resolution was voted, *Nemine contradicente*—*Without a dissenting voice* (*v.* 8); it was one and all; and, when it was put in execution, they were knit together as one man, *v.* 11. This was their glory and strength, that the several tribes had no separate interests when the common good was concerned.

12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? 13 Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel: 14 But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel. 15 And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men. 16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss. 17 And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

Here is, I The fair and just demand which

the tribes of Israel, now encamped, sent to the tribe of Benjamin, to deliver up the malefactors of Gibeah to justice, *v.* 12, 13. If the tribe of Benjamin had come up, as they ought to have done, to the assembly, and agreed with them in their resolution, there would have been none to deal with but the men of Gibeah only, but they, by their absence, taking part with the criminals, application must be made to them all. The Israelites were zealous against the wickedness that was committed, yet they were discreet in their zeal, and did not think it would justify them in falling upon the whole tribe of Benjamin unless they, by refusing to give up the criminals, and protecting them against justice, should make themselves guilty, *ex post facto*—*as accessories after the fact*. They desire them to consider how great the wickedness was that was committed (*v.* 12), and that it was done among them: and how necessary it was therefore that they should either punish the malefactors with death themselves, according to the law of Moses, or deliver them up to this general assembly, to be so much the more publicly and solemnly punished, that evil might be put away from Israel, the national guilt removed, the infection stopped by cutting off the gangrened part, and national judgments prevented; for the sin was so very like that of the Sodomites that they might justly fear, if they did not punish it, God would rain hail from heaven upon them, as he did, not only upon Sodom, but the neighbouring cities. If the Israelites had not made this reasonable demand, they would have had much more reason to lament the following desolations of Benjamin. All methods of accommodation must be used before we go to war or go to law. The demand was like that of Joab's to Abel, 2 Sam. xx. 20, 21 "Only deliver up the traitor, and we will lay down our arms." On these terms, and no other, God will be at peace with us, that we part with our sins, that we mortify and crucify our lusts, and then all shall be well; his anger will be turned away.

II. The wretched obstinacy and perverseness of the men of Benjamin, who seem to have been as unanimous and zealous in their resolutions to stand by the criminals as the rest of the tribes were to punish them, so little sense had they of their honour, duty, and interest. 1. They were so prodigiously vile as to patronise the wickedness that was committed: *They would not hearken to the voice of their brethren* (*v.* 13), either because those of that tribe were generally more vicious and debauched at this time than the rest of the tribes, and therefore would not bear to have that punished in others of which they knew themselves guilty (some of the most fruitful and pleasant parts of Canaan fell to the lot of this tribe; their land, like that of Sodom, was *as the garden of the Lord*, which perhaps helped to make the inhabitants, like the men of Sodom, wicked, and sinners before the

Lord exceedingly, Gen. xiii. 10, 13), or because (as bishop Patrick suggests) they took it ill that the other tribes should meddle with their concerns; they would not do that which they knew was their duty because they were reminded of it by their brethren, by whom they scorned to be taught and controlled. If there were any wise men among them that would have complied with the demand made, yet they were overpowered by the majority, who thus made the crime of the men of Gibeah their own. Thus we have *fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness* if we say *A confederacy* with those that have, and make ourselves guilty of other men's sins by countenancing and defending them. It seems there is no cause so bad but it will find some patrons, some advocates, to appear for it; but *woe be to those by whom such offences come*. Those will have a great deal to answer for that obstruct the course of necessary justice, and strengthen the hands of the wicked, by saying, *O wicked man! thou shalt not die*.

2. They were so prodigiously vain and presumptuous as to make head against the united force of all Israel. Never, surely, were men so wretchedly infatuated as they were when they took up arms in opposition, (1.) To so good a cause as Israel had. How could they expect to prosper when they fought against justice, and consequently against the just God himself, against those that had the high priest and the divine oracle on their side, and so acted in downright rebellion against the sacred and supreme authority of the nation. (2.) To so great a force as Israel had. The disproportion of their numbers was much greater than that, Luke xiv. 31, 32, where he that had but 10,000 durst not meet him that came against him with 20,000, and therefore desired conditions of peace. There the enemy was but two to one, here above fifteen to one; yet they despised conditions of peace. All the forces they could bring into the field were but 26,000 men, besides 700 men of Gibeah (v. 15); yet with these they will dare to face 400,000 men of Israel, v. 17. Thus sinners are infatuated to their own ruin, and provoke him to jealousy who is infinitely stronger than they, 1 Cor. x. 22. But it should seem they depended upon the skill of their men to make up what was wanting in numbers, especially a regiment of slingers, 700 men, who, though left-handed, were so dexterous at slinging stones that they would not be a hair's breadth beside their mark, v. 16. But these good marksmen were very much out in their aim when they espoused this bad cause. *Benjamin* signifies *the son of the right hand*, yet we find his posterity left-handed.

18 And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the

battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first. 19 And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. 21 And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men. 22 And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. 23 (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.) 24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

We have here the defeat of the men of Israel in their first and second battle with the Benjamites.

1. Before their first engagement they asked counsel of God concerning the order of their battle and were directed, and yet they were sorely beaten. They did not think it was proper to ask of God whether they should go up at all against Benjamin (the case was plain enough, the men of Gibeah must be punished for their wickedness, and Israel must inflict the punishment or it will not be done), but "Who shall go first?" (v. 18), that is, "Who shall be general of our army?" for, which soever tribe was appointed to go first, the prince of that tribe must be looked upon as commander-in-chief of the whole body. For, if they had meant it of the order of their march only, it would have been proper to ask, "Who shall go next?" and then, "Who next?" But, if they know that Judah must go first, they know they must all observe the orders of the prince of that tribe. This honour was done to Judah because our Lord Jesus was to spring from that tribe, who was in all things to have the pre-

eminence. The tribe that went up first had the most honourable post, but withal the most dangerous, and probably lost most in the engagement. Who would strive for precedence that sees the peril of it? Yet though Judah, that strong and valiant tribe, goes up first, and all the tribes of Israel attend them, *little Benjamin* (so he is called, Ps. lxxviii. 27), is too hard for them all. The whole army lays siege to Gibeah, v. 19. The Benjamites advance to raise the siege, and the army prepares to give them a warm reception (v. 20), turns upon them to fight them, v. 20. But between the Benjamites that attacked them in the front with incredible fury, and the men of Gibeah that sallied out upon their rear, they were put into confusion and lost 22,000 men, v. 21. Here were no prisoners taken, for there was no quarter given, but all put to the sword.

II. Before their second engagement they again asked counsel of God, and more solemnly than before; for they wept before the Lord until evening (v. 23), lamenting the loss of so many brave men, especially as it was a token of God's displeasure and would give occasion to the Benjamites to triumph in the success of their wickedness. Also at this time they did not ask who should go up first, but whether they should go up at all. They intimate a reason why they should scruple to do it, especially now that Providence had frowned upon them, because Benjamin was their brother, and a readiness to lay down their arms if God should so order them. God bade them go up; he allowed the attempt, for, though Benjamin was their brother, he was a gangrened member of their body and must be cut off. Upon this they encouraged themselves, perhaps more in their own strength than in the divine commission, and made a second attempt upon the forces of the rebels, in the same place where the former battle was fought (v. 22), with the hope of retrieving their credit upon the same spot of ground where they had lost it, which they would not superstitiously change, as if there were any thing unlucky in the place. But they were this second time repulsed, with the loss of 18,000 men, v. 25. The former day's loss and this amounted to 40,000, which was just a tenth part of the whole army, and the same number that they had drawn out by lot to fetch victuals, v. 10. They decimated themselves for that service, and now God again decimated them for the slaughter. But what shall we say to these things, that so just and honourable a cause should thus be put to the worst once and again? Were they not fighting God's battles against sin? Had they not his commission? What, and yet miscarry thus! 1. God's judgments are a great deep, and his way is in the sea. *Clouds and darkness are often round about him, but judgment and justice are always the habitation of his throne* We may be sure

of the righteousness, when we cannot see the reasons, of God's proceedings. 2. God would hereby show them, and us in them, that *the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong*, that we are not to confide in numbers, which perhaps the Israelites did with too much assurance. We must never lay the weight on an arm of flesh, which only the Rock of ages will bear. 3. God designed hereby to correct Israel for their sins. They did well to show such a zeal against the wickedness of Gibeah: but *were there not with them, even with them, sins against the Lord their God?* Those must be made to know their own iniquity that are forward in condemning the iniquity of others. Some think it was a rebuke to them for not witnessing against the idolatry of Micah and the Danites, by which their religion was corrupted, as they now did against the lewdness of Gibeah and the Benjamites, by which the public peace was disturbed, though God had particularly ordered them to levy war upon idolaters, Deut. xiii. 12, &c. 4. God would hereby teach us not to think it strange if a good cause should suffer defeat for a while, nor to judge of the merits of it by the success of it. The interest of grace in the heart, and of religion in the world, may be foiled, and suffer great loss, and seem to be quite run down, but judgment will be brought forth to victory at last. *Vincimur in prælio, sed non in bello—We are foiled in a battle, but not in the whole campaign.* Right may fall, but it shall arise.

26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 27 And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand. 29 And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah. 30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to

smite of the people, *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways. 33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah. 34 And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil *was* near them. 35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and a hundred men: all these drew the sword. 36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah. 37 And the liers in wait hastened, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city. 39 And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle. 40 But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven. 41 And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them. 42 Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the

way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which *came* out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. 43 *Thus* they inclosed the Benjamites round about, *and* chased them, *and* trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. 44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these *were* men of valour. 45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them. 46 So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these *were* men of valour. 47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

We have here a full account of the complete victory which the Israelites obtained over the Benjamites in the third engagement: the righteous cause was victorious at last, when the managers of it amended what had been amiss; for, when a good cause suffers, it is for want of good management. Observe then how the victory was obtained, and how it was pursued.

I. How the victory was obtained. Two things they had trusted too much to in the former engagements—the goodness of their cause and the superiority of their numbers. It was true that they had both right and strength on their side, which were great advantages; but they depended too much upon them, to the neglect of those duties to which now, this third time, when they see their error, they apply themselves.

1. They were previously so confident of the goodness of their cause that they thought it needless to address themselves to God for his presence and blessing. They took it for granted that God would bless them, nay, perhaps they concluded that he owed them his favour, and could not in justice withhold it, since it was in defence of virtue that they appeared and took up arms. But God having shown them that he was under no



obligation to prosper their enterprise, that he neither needed them nor was tied to them, that they were more indebted to him for the honour of being ministers of his justice than he to them for the service, now they became humble petitioners for success. Before they only consulted God's oracle, *Who shall go up first? And, Shall we go up?* But now they implored his favour, fasted and prayed, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings (v. 26), to make an atonement for sin and an acknowledgment of their dependence upon God, and as an expression of their desire towards him. We cannot expect the presence of God with us, unless we thus seek it in the way he has appointed. And when they were in this frame, and thus sought the Lord, then he not only ordered them to go up against the Benjamites the third time, but gave them a promise of victory: *To-morrow I will deliver them into thy hand*, v. 28.

2. They were previously so confident of the greatness of their strength that they thought it needless to use any art, to lay any ambush, or form a stratagem, not doubting but to conquer purely by a strong hand; but now they saw it was requisite to use some policy, as if they had an enemy to deal with them that had been superior in number; accordingly, they set *liers in wait* (v. 29), and gained their point, as their fathers did before Ai (Josh. viii.), stratagems of that kind being most likely to take effect after a previous defeat, which has flushed the enemy, and made the pretended flight the less suspected. The management of this artifice is here very largely described. The assurance God had given them of success in this day's action, instead of making them remiss and presumptuous, set all heads and hands on work for the effecting of what God had promised.

(1.) Observe the method they took. The body of the army faced the city of Gibeah, as they had done before, advancing towards the gates, v. 30. The Benjamites, the body of whose army was now quartered at Gibeah, sallied out upon them, and charged them with great bravery. The besiegers gave back, retired with precipitation, as if their hearts failed them upon the sight of the Benjamites, which they were willing to believe, proudly imagining that by their former success they had made themselves very formidable. Some loss the Israelites sustained in this counterfeit fight, about thirty men being cut off in their rear, v. 31, 39. But, when the Benjamites were all drawn out of the city, the ambush seized the city (v. 37), gave a signal to the body of the army (v. 38, 40), which immediately turned upon them (v. 41), and, it should seem, another considerable party that was posted at Baal-tamar came upon them at the same time (v. 33); so that the Benjamites were quite surrounded, which put them into the greatest consternation that could be. A sense of guilt now disheartened them, and the higher their hopes had been

raised the more grievous was this confusion. At first *the battle was sore* (v. 34), the Benjamites fought with fury; but, when they saw what a snare they were drawn into, they thought one pair of heels (as we say) was worth two pair of hands, and they made the best of their way towards the wilderness (v. 42); but in vain: *the battle overtook them*, and, to complete their distress, *those who came out of the cities of Israel*, that waited to see the event of the battle, joined with their pursuers, and helped to cut them off. Every man's hand was against them.

(2.) Observe in this story, [1.] That the Benjamites, in the beginning of the battle, were confident that the day was their own: *They are smitten down before us*, v. 32, 39. Sometimes God suffers wicked men to be lifted up in successes and hopes, that their fall may be the sorer. See how short their joy is, and their triumphing but for a moment. *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast*, except he has reason to boast in God. [2.] Evil was near them and they did not know it, v. 34. But (v. 41) they saw, when it was too late to prevent it, *that evil had come upon them*. What evils may at any time be near us we cannot tell, but the less they are feared the heavier they fall. Sinners will not be persuaded to see evil near them, but how dreadful will it be when it comes and there is no escaping! 1 Thess. v. 3. [3.] Though the men of Israel played their parts so well in this engagement, yet the victory is ascribed to God (v. 35): *The Lord smote Benjamin before Israel*. The battle was his, and so was the success. [4.] *They trode down the men of Benjamin with ease* when God fought against them, v. 43. It is an easy thing to trample upon those who have made God their enemy. See Mal. iv. 3.

II. How the victory was prosecuted and improved in a military execution done upon these sinners against their own souls. 1. Gibeah itself, that nest of lewdness, was destroyed in the first place. The ambush that entered the city by surprise *drew themselves along*, that is, dispersed themselves into the several parts of it, which they might easily do, now that all the men of war had sallied out and very presumptuously left it defenceless; and they smote all they found, even women and children, *with the sword* (v. 37), and set fire to the city, v. 40. Sin brings ruin upon cities. 2. The army in the field was quite routed and cut off: 18,000 men of valour lay dead upon the spot, v. 44. 3. Those that escaped from the field were pursued, and cut off in their flight, to the number of 7000, v. 45. It is to no purpose to think of out-running divine vengeance. *Evil pursues sinners*, and it will overtake them. 4. Even those that tarried at home were involved in the ruin. *They let their sword devour for ever*, not considering that *it would be bitterness in the latter end*, as Abner pleads long after, when he was at the head of

an army of Benjamites, probably with an eye to this very story, 2 Sam. ii. 25, 26. They put to the sword all that breathed, and set fire to *all the cities*, v. 48. So that of all the tribe of Benjamin, for aught that appears, there remained none alive but 600 men that took shelter in the rock Rimmon, and lay close there four months, v. 47. Now, (1.) It is difficult to justify this severity as it was Israel's act. The whole tribe of Benjamin was culpable; but must they therefore be treated as devoted Canaanites? That it was done in the heat of war, that this was the way of prosecuting victories which the sword of Israel had been accustomed to, that the Israelites were extremely exasperated against the Benjamites for the slaughter they had made among them in the two former engagements, will go but a little way to excuse the cruelty of this execution. It is true they had sworn that whosoever did not come up to Mizpeh should be *put to death*, ch. xxi. 5. But that, if it was a justifiable oath, yet extended only to the men of war; the rest were not expected to come. Yet, (2.) It is easy to justify the hand of God in it. Benjamin had sinned against him, and God had threatened that, if they forgot him, they should *perish as the nations* that were before them perished (Deut. viii. 20), who were all in this manner cut off. (3.) It is easy likewise to improve it for warning against the beginnings of sin: they are *like the letting forth of water, therefore leave it off before it be meddled with*, for we know not *what will be in the end thereof*. The eternal ruin of souls will be worse, and more fearful, than all these desolations of a tribe. This affair of Gibeah is twice spoken of by the prophet Hosea as the beginning of the corruption of Israel and a pattern to all that followed (Hos. ix. 9): *They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah*; and (Hos. x. 9), *Thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah*; and it is added that *the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not* (that is, did not at first) *overtake them*.

## CHAP. XXI.

The ruins of the tribe of Benjamin we read of in the foregoing chapter; now here we have, 1. The lamentation which Israel made over these ruins, ver. 1—4, 6, 15. 11. The provision they made for the repair of them out of the 600 men that escaped, for whom they procured wives, 1. Of the virgins of Jabesh-Gilead, when they destroyed that city for not sending its forces to the general rendezvous, ver. 5, 7—11. 2. Of the daughters of Shiloh, ver. 16—25. And so this melancholy story concludes.

**N**OW the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife. 2 And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; 3 And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel? 4 And it came to

pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5 And the children of Israel said, Who *is there* among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death. 6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. 7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives? 8 And they said, What one *is there* of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. 9 For the people were numbered, and, behold, *there were* none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there. 10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. 11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan. 13 And the whole congregation sent *some* to speak to the children of Benjamin that *were* in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them. 14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not. 15 And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

We may observe in these verses,

I. The ardent zeal which the Israelites had expressed against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, as it was countenanced by the tribe of Benjamin. Occasion is here given to mention two instances of their zeal on this occasion, which we did not meet with before:—1. While the general convention of the states was gathering together, and was waiting for a full house before they would proceed, they bound themselves with the great execration, which they called the *Cherum*, utterly to destroy all those cities that should not send in their representatives and their quota of men upon this occasion, or had sentenced those to that curse who should thus refuse (*v. 5*); for they would look upon such refusers as having no indignation at the crime committed, no concern for the securing of the nation from God's judgments by the administration of justice, nor any regard to the authority of a common consent, by which they were summoned to meet. 2. When they had met and heard the cause they made another solemn oath that none of all the thousands of Israel then present, nor any of those whom they represented (not intending to bind their posterity), should, if they could help it, *marry a daughter to a Benjamite, v. 1*. This was made an article of the war, not with any design to extirpate the tribe, but because in general they would treat those who were then actors and abettors of this villany in all respects as they treated the devoted nations of Canaan, whom they were not only obliged to destroy, but with whom they were forbidden to marry; and because, in particular, they judged those unworthy to match with a daughter of Israel that had been so very barbarous and abusive to one of the tender sex, than which nothing could be done more base and villainous, nor a more certain indication given of a mind perfectly lost to all honour and virtue. We may suppose that the Levite's sending the mangled pieces of his wife's body to the several tribes helped very much to inspire them with all this fury, and much more than a bare narrative of the fact, though ever so well attested, would have done, so much does the eye affect the heart.

II. The deep concern which the Israelites did express for the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin when it was accomplished. Observe,

1. The tide of their anger at Benjamin's crime did not run so high and so strong before but the tide of their grief for Benjamin's destruction ran as high and as strong after: *They repented for Benjamin their brother, v. 6, 15*. They did not repent of their zeal against the sin; there is a holy indignation against sin, the fruit of godly sorrow, which is to *salvation, not to be repented of*, 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. But they repented of the sad consequences of what they had done, that they had carried the matter further than was either just or neces-

sary. It would have been enough to destroy all they found in arms; they needed not to have cut off the husbandmen and shepherds, the women and children. Note, (1.) There may be over-doing in well-doing. Great care must be taken in the government of our zeal, lest that which seemed supernatural in its causes prove unnatural in its effects. That is no good divinity which swallows up humanity. Many a war is ill ended which was well begun. (2.) Even necessary justice is to be done with compassion. God does not punish with delight, nor should men. (3.) Strong passions make work for repentance. What we say and do in a heat, our calmer thoughts commonly wish undone again. (4.) In a civil war (according to the usage of the Romans) no victories ought to be celebrated with triumphs, because, which soever side gets, the community loses, as here *there is a tribe cut off from Israel*. What the better is the body for one member's crushing another? Now,

2. How did they express their concern?

(1.) By their grief for the breach that was made. They came to the house of God, for thither they brought all their doubts, all their counsels, all their cares, and all their sorrows. There was to be heard on this occasion, not the voice of joy and praise, but only that of lamentation, and mourning, and woe: *They lifted up their voices and wept sore (v. 2)*, not so much for the 40,000 whom they had lost (these would not be so much missed out of eleven tribes), but for the entire destruction of one whole tribe; for this was the complaint they poured out before God (*v. 3*): *There is one tribe lacking*. God had taken care of every tribe; their number twelve was that which they were known by; every tribe had his station appointed in the camp, and his stone in the high priest's breast-plate; every tribe had his blessing both from Jacob and Moses; and it would be an intolerable reproach to them if they should drop any out of this illustrious jury, and lose one out of twelve, especially Benjamin, the youngest, who was particularly dear to Jacob their common ancestor, and whom all the rest ought to have been in a particular manner tender of. Benjamin is not; what then will become of Jacob? Benjamin become a Benoni, the son of the right hand a son of sorrow! In this trouble they built an altar, not in competition, but in communion with the appointed altar at the door of the tabernacle, which was not large enough to contain all the sacrifices they designed; for they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, to give thanks for their victory, yet to atone for their own folly in the pursuit of it, and to implore the divine favour in their present strait. Every thing that grieves us should bring us to God. (2.) By their amicable treaty with the poor distressed refugees that were hidden in the rock

Rimmon, to whom they sent an act of indemnity, assuring them, upon the public faith, that they would now no longer treat them as enemies, but receive them as brethren, v. 13. The falling out of friends should thus be the renewing of friendship. Even those that have sinned, if at length they repent, must be forgiven and comforted, 2 Cor. ii. 7. (3.) By the care they took to provide wives for them, that their tribe might be built up again, and the ruins of it repaired. Had the men of Israel sought themselves, they would have been secretly pleased with the extinguishing of the families of Benjamin, because then the land allotted to them would escheat to the rest of the tribes, *ob defectum sanguinis—for want of heirs*, and be easily seized for want of occupants; but those have not the spirit of Israelites who aim to raise themselves upon the ruins of their neighbours. They were so far from any design of this kind that all heads were at work to find out ways and means for the rebuilding of this tribe. All the women and children of Benjamin were slain: they had sworn not to marry their daughters to any of them; it was against the divine law that they should match with the Canaanites; to oblige them to that would be, in effect, to bid them *go and serve other gods*. What must they do then for wives for them? While the poor distressed Benjamites that were hidden in the rock feared their brethren were contriving to ruin them, they were at the same time upon a project to prefer them; and it was this:—[1.] There was a piece of necessary justice to be done upon the city of Jabesh-Gilead, which belonged to the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. It was found upon looking over the muster-roll (which was taken, *ch.* xx. 2) that none appeared from that city upon the general summons (v. 8, 9), and it was then resolved, before it appeared who were absent, that whatever city of Israel should be guilty of such a contempt of the public authority and interest that city should be an anathema; Jabesh-Gilead lies under that severe sentence, which might by no means be dispensed with. Those that had spared the Canaanites in many places, who were devoted to destruction by the divine command, could not find in their hearts to spare their brethren that were devoted by their own curse. Why did they not now send men to root the Jehusites out of Jerusalem, to avoid whom the poor Levite had been forced to go to Gibeah? *ch.* xix. 11, 12. Men are commonly more zealous to support their own authority than God's. A detachment is therefore sent of 12,000 men, to execute the sentence upon Jabesh-Gilead. Having found that when the whole body of the army went against Gibeah the people were thought too many for God to deliver them into their hands, on this expedition they sent but a few, v. 10.

Their commission is to put all to the sword, men, women, and children (v. 11), according to that law (Lev. xxvii. 29), *Whatsoever is devoted of men*, by those that have power to do it, *shall surely be put to death*. [2.] An expedient is hence formed for providing the Benjamites with wives. When Moses sent the same number of men to avenge the Lord on Midian, the same orders were given as here, that all married women should be slain with their husbands, as one with them, but that the virgins should be saved alive, Num. xxxi. 17, 18. That precedent was sufficient to support the distinction here made between a wife and a virgin, v. 11, 12. 400 virgins that were marriageable were found in Jabesh-Gilead, and these were married to so many of the surviving Benjamites, v. 14. Their fathers were not present when the vow was made not to marry with Benjamites, so that they were not under any colour of obligation by it: and besides, being a prey taken in war, they were at the disposal of the conquerors. Perhaps the alliance now contracted between Benjamin and Jabesh-Gilead made Saul, who was a Benjamite, the more concerned for that place (1 Sam. xi. 4), though then inhabited by new families.

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin? 17 And they said, *There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin*, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel. 18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, *Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin*. 19 Then they said, Behold, *there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah*. 20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, *Go and lie in wait in the vineyards*; 21 And see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22 And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, *Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved*

not to each man his wife in the war : for ye did not give unto them at this time, *that ye should be guilty.* 23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took *them* wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught : and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them. 24 And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. 25 In those days *there was no king in Israel* : every man did *that which was right* in his own eyes.

We have here the method that was taken to provide the 200 Benjamites that remained with wives. And, though the tribe was reduced to a small number, they were only in care to provide each man with one wife, not with more under pretence of multiplying them the faster. They may not bestow their daughters upon them, but to save their oath, and yet marry some of their daughters to them, they put them into a way of taking them by surprise, and marrying them, which should be ratified by their parents' consent, *ex post facto—afterwards.* The less consideration is used before the making of a vow, the more, commonly, there is need of afterwards for the keeping of it.

I. That which gave an opportunity for the doing of this was a public ball at Shiloh, in the fields, at which all the young ladies of that city and the parts adjacent that were so disposed met to dance, in honour of a *feast of the Lord* then observed, probably the feast of tabernacles (v. 19), for that feast (bishop Patrick says) was the only season wherein the Jewish virgins were allowed to dance, and that not so much for their own recreation as to express their holy joy, as David when he danced before the ark, otherwise the present melancholy posture of public affairs would have made dancing unseasonable, as Isa. xxii. 12, 13. The dancing was very modest and chaste. It was not mixed dancing; no men danced with these daughters of Shiloh, nor did any married women so far forget their gravity as to join with them. However their dancing thus in public made them an easy prey to those that had a design upon them, whence bishop Hall observes that *the ambushes of evil spirits carry away many souls from dancing to a fearful desolation.*

II. The elders of Israel gave authority to the Benjamites to do this, to *lie in wait in the vineyards* which surrounded the green they used to dance on, and, when they were in the midst of their sport, to come upon

them, and catch every man a wife for himself, and carry them straight away to their own country, v. 20, 21. They knew that none of their own daughters would be there, so that the parents of these virgins could not be said to give them, for they knew nothing of the matter. A sorry *salvo* is better than none, to save the breaking of an oath : it were much better to be cautious in making vows, that there be not occasion afterwards, as there was here, *to say before the angel that it was an error.* Here was a very preposterous way of match-making, when both the mutual affection of the young people and the consent of the parents must be presumed to come after; the case was extraordinary, and may by no means be drawn into a precedent. Overhasty marriages often occasion a leisurely repentance; and what comfort can be expected from a match made either by force or fraud? The virgins of Jabesh-Gilead were taken out of the midst of blood and slaughter, but these of Shiloh out of the midst of mirth and joy; the former had reason to be thankful that they had their lives for a prey, and the latter, it is to be hoped, had no cause to complain, after a while, when they found themselves matched, not to men of broken and desperate fortunes, as they seemed to be, who were lately fetched out of a cave, but to men of the best and largest estates in the nation, as they must needs be when the lot of the whole tribe of Benjamin, which consisted of 45,600 men (Num. xxvi. 41), came to be divided again among 600, who had all by survivorship.

III. They undertook to pacify the fathers of these young women. As to the infringement of their paternal authority, they would easily forgive it when they considered to what fair estates their daughters were matched and what mothers in Israel they were likely to be; but the oath they were bound by, not to give their daughters to Benjamites, might perhaps stick with some of them, whose consciences were tender, yet, as to that, this might satisfy them:—1. That the necessity was urgent (v. 22): *We reserved not to each man his wife*, owning now that they did ill to destroy all the women, and desiring to atone for their too rigorous construction of their vow to destroy them by the most favourable construction of their vow not to match with them. "And therefore for our sakes, who were too severe, let them keep what they have got." For, 2. In strictness it was not a breach of their vow; they had sworn not to give them their daughters, but they had not sworn to fetch them back if they were forcibly taken, so that if there was any fault the elders must be responsible, not the parents. And *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet—That which ought not to have been done is yet valid when it is done.* The thing was done, and is ratified only by connivance, according to the law, Num. xxx. 4.

*Lastly*, In the close of all we have, 1. The settling of the tribe of Benjamin again. The few that remained returned to the inheritance of that tribe, *v.* 23. And soon after from among them sprang Ehud, who was famous in his generation, the second judge of Israel, *ch.* iii. 15. 2. The disbanding and dispersing of the army of Israel, *v.* 24. They did not set up for a standing army, nor pretend to make any alterations or establishments in the government; but, when the affair was

over for which they were called together they quietly departed in God's peace, every man to his family. Public services must not make us think ourselves above our own private affairs and the duty of providing for our own house. 3. A repetition of the cause of these confusions, *v.* 25. Though God was their King, every man would be his own master, as if there was no king. Blessed be God for magistracy.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

ON THE BOOK OF

## R U T H.

**THIS** short history of the domestic affairs of one particular family fitly follows the book of Judges (the events related here happening in the days of the judges), and fitly goes before the books of Samuel, because in the close it introduces David; yet the Jews, in their Bibles, separate it from both, and make it one of the five *Megilloth*, or *Volumes*, which they put together towards the latter end, in this order: *Solomon's Song*, *Ruth*, *Lamentations*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Esther*. It is probable that Samuel was the penman of it. It relates not miracles nor laws, wars nor victories, nor the revolutions of states, but the affliction first and afterwards the comfort of Naomi, the conversion first and afterwards the preferment of Ruth. Many such events have happened, which perhaps we may think as well worthy to be recorded; but these God saw fit to transmit the knowledge of to us; and even common historians think they have liberty to choose their subject. The design of this book is, I. To lead to providence, to show us how conversant it is about our private concerns, and to teach us in them all to have an eye to it, acknowledging God in all our ways and in all events that concern us. See 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8; Ps. cxiii. 7—9. II. To lead to Christ, who descended from Ruth, and part of whose genealogy concludes the book, whence it is fetched into Matt. i. In the conversion of Ruth the Moabitess, and the bringing of her into the pedigree of the Messiah, we have a type of the calling of the Gentiles in due time into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. The afflictions of Naomi and Ruth we have an account of, *ch.* i. Instances of their industry and humility, *ch.* ii. The bringing of them into an alliance with Boaz, *ch.* iii. And their happy settlement thereby, *ch.* iv. And let us remember the scene is laid in Bethlehem, the city where our Redeemer was born.

## CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have Naomi's afflictions. I. As a distressed housekeeper, forced by famine to remove into the land of Moab, *ver.* 1, 2. II. As a mournful widow and mother, bewailing the death of her husband and her two sons, *ver.* 3—5. III. As a careful mother-in-law, desirous to be kind to her two daughters, but at a loss how to be so when she returns to her own country, *ver.* 6—13. Orpah she parts with in sorrow, *ver.* 14. Ruth she takes with her in fear, *ver.* 15—18. IV. As a poor woman sent back to the place of her first settlement, to be supported by the kindness of her friends, *ver.* 19—22. All these things were melancholy and seemed against her, and yet all were working for good.

**N**OW it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two

sons. 2 And the name of the man was Eliemelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. 3 And Eliemelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about

ten years. 5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

The first words give all the date we have of this story. It was *in the days when the judges ruled* (v. 1), not in those disorderly times when *there was no king in Israel*; but under which of the judges these things happened we are not told, and the conjectures of the learned are very uncertain. It must have been towards the beginning of the judges' time, for Boaz, who married Ruth, was born of Rahab, who received the spies in Joshua's time. Some think it was in the days of Ehud, others of Deborah; the learned bishop Patrick inclines to think it was in the days of Gideon, because in his days only we read of a famine by the Midianites' invasion, Judges vi. 3, 4. While the judges were ruling, some one city and some another, Providence takes particular cognizance of Bethlehem, and has an eye to a King, to Messiah himself, who should descend from two Gentile mothers, Rahab and Ruth. Here is,

I. A famine in the land, in the land of Canaan, that land *flowing with milk and honey*. This was one of the judgments which God had threatened to bring upon them for their sins, Lev. xxvi. 19, 20. He has many arrows in his quiver. In the days of the judges they were oppressed by their enemies; and, when by that judgment they were not reformed, God tried this, for when he *judges he will overcome*. When the land had rest, yet it had not plenty; even in Bethlehem, which signifies *the house of bread*, there was scarcity. A *fruitful land is turned into barrenness*, to correct and restrain the luxury and wantonness of those that dwell therein.

II. An account of one particular family distressed in the famine; it is that of *Elimelech*. His name signifies *my God a king*, agreeable to the state of Israel when the judges ruled, for the Lord was their King, and comfortable to him and his family in their affliction, that God was theirs and that he reigns for ever. His wife was *Naomi*, which signifies *my amiable or pleasant one*. But his sons' names were *Mahlon* and *Chilion*, *sickness* and *consumption*, perhaps because weakly children, and not likely to be long-lived. Such are the productions of our pleasant things, weak and infirm, fading and dying.

III. The removal of this family from Bethlehem into the country of Moab on the other side Jordan, for subsistence, because of the famine, v. 1, 2. It seems there was plenty in the country of Moab when there was scarcity of bread in the land of Israel. Common gifts of providence are often bestowed in greater plenty upon those that are strangers to God than upon those that know

and worship him. *Moab is at ease from his youth*, while Israel is *emptied from vessel to vessel* (Jer. xlviii. 11), not because God loved Moabites better, but because they have *their portion in this life*. Thither Elimelech goes not to settle for ever, but to sojourn for a time, during the dearth, as Abraham, on a similar occasion, went into Egypt, and Isaac into the land of the Philistines. Now here, 1. Elimelech's care to provide for his family, and his taking his wife and children with him, were without doubt commendable. *If any provide not for his own, he hath denied the faith*, 1 Tim. v. 8. When he was in his straits he did not forsake his house, go seek his fortune himself, and leave his wife and children to shift for their own maintenance; but, as became a tender husband and a loving father, where he went he took them with him, not as the ostrich, Job xxxix. 16. But, 2. I see not how his removal into the country of Moab, upon this occasion, could be justified. Abraham and Isaac were only sojourners in Canaan, and it was agreeable to their condition to remove; but the seed of Israel were now fixed, and ought not to remove into the territories of the heathen. What reason had Elimelech to go more than any of his neighbours? If by any ill husbandry he had wasted his patrimony, and sold his land or mortgaged it (as it should seem, ch. iv. 3, 4), which brought him into a more necessitous condition than others, the law of God would have obliged his neighbours to relieve him (Lev. xxv. 35); but that was not his case, for he went out full, v. 21. By those who tarried at home it appears that the famine was not so extreme but that there was sufficient to keep life and soul together; and his charge was but small, only two sons. But if he could not be content with the short allowance that his neighbours took up with, and *in the day of famine could not be satisfied* unless he kept as plentiful a table as he had done formerly, if he could not live in hope that there would come years of plenty again in due time, or could not with patience wait for those years, it was his fault, and he did by it dishonour God and the good land he had given them, *weaken the hands of his brethren*, with whom he should have been willing to take his lot, and set an ill example to others. If all should do as he did Canaan would be dispeopled. Note, It is an evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God hath set us, and to be for leaving it immediately whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it. It is folly to think of escaping that cross which, being laid in our way, we ought to take up. It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it. Or, if he would remove, why to the country of Moab? If he had made enquiry, it is probable he would have found plenty in some of the

tribes of Israel, those, for instance, on the other side Jordan, that bordered on the land of Moab; if he had had that zeal for God and his worship, and that affection for his orerhnen which became an Israelite, he would not have persuaded himself so easily to go and sojourn among Moabites.

IV. The marriage of his two sons to two of the daughters of Moab after his death, v. 4. All agree that this was ill done. The Chaldee says, *They transgressed the decree of the word of the Lord in taking strange wives.* If they would not stay unmarried till their return to the land of Israel, they were not so far off but that they might have fetched themselves wives thence. Little did Elimelech think, when he went to sojourn in Moab, that ever his sons would thus join in affinity with Moabites. But those that bring young people into bad acquaintance, and take them out of the way of public ordinances, though they may think them well-principled and armed against temptation, know not what they do, nor *what will be the end thereof.* It does not appear that the women they married were proselyted to the Jewish religion, for Orpah is said to return to her gods (v. 15); the gods of Moab were hers still. It is a groundless tradition of the Jews that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon king of Moab, yet the Chaldee paraphrast inserts it; but this and their other tradition, which he inserts likewise, cannot agree, that Boaz who married Ruth was the same with Ibzan, who judged Israel 200 years after Eglon's death, Judg. xii.

V. The death of Elimelech and his two sons, and the disconsolate condition Naomi was thereby reduced to. Her husband died (v. 3) and her two sons (v. 5) soon after their marriage, and the Chaldee says, *Their days were shortened,* because they transgressed the law in marrying strange wives. See here, 1. That wherever we go we cannot out-run death, whose fatal arrows fly in all places. 2. That we cannot expect to prosper when we go out of the way of our duty. *He that will save his life by any indirect course shall lose it.* 3. That death, when it comes into a family, often makes breach upon breach. One is taken away to prepare another to follow soon after; one is taken away, and that affliction is not duly improved, and therefore God sends another of the same kind. When Naomi had lost her husband she took so much the more complacency and put so much the more confidence in her sons. Under the shadow of these surviving comforts she thinks she shall live among the heathen, and exceedingly glad she was of these gourds; but behold they wither presently, *green and growing up in the morning, cut down and dried up before night,* buried soon after they were married, for neither of them left any children. So uncertain and transient are all our enjoyments here. It is therefore our wisdom to

make sure of those comforts that will be made sure and of which death cannot rob us. But how desolate was the condition, and how disconsolate the spirit, of poor Naomi, when the woman *was left of her two sons and her husband!* When *these two things, loss of children and widowhood, come upon her in a moment, come upon her in their perfection, by whom shall she be comforted?* Isa. xlvii. 9; li. 19. It is God alone who has wherewithal to comfort those who are thus cast down.

6 Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. 7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. 8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. 9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. 10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. 11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also to night, and should also bear sons; 13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me. 14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. 15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. 16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave



thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *ifaught* but death part thee and me. 18 When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

See here, I. The good affection Naomi bore to the land of Israel, *v.* 6. Though she could not stay in it while the famine lasted, she would not stay out of it when the famine ceased. Though the country of Moab had afforded her shelter and supply in a time of need, yet she did not intend it should be her rest for ever; no land should be that but the holy land, in which the sanctuary of God was, of which he had said, *This is my rest for ever.* Observe,

1. God, at last, returned in mercy to his people; for, though he contend long, he will not contend always. As the judgment of oppression, under which they often groaned in the time of the judges, still came to an end, after a while, when God had raised them up a deliverer, so here the judgment of famine: At length God graciously *visited his people in giving them bread.* Plenty is God's gift, and it is his visitation which by bread, the staff of life, *holds our souls in life.* Though this mercy be the more striking when it comes after famine, yet if we have constantly enjoyed it, and never knew what famine meant, we are not to think it the less valuable.

2. Naomi then returned, in duty to her people. She had often enquired of their state, what harvests they had and how the markets went, and still the tidings were discouraging; but like the prophet's servant, who, having looked seven times and seen no sign of rain, at length discerned a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, which soon overspread the heavens, so Naomi at last has good news brought her of plenty in Bethlehem, and then she can think of no other than returning thither again. Her new alliances in the country of Moab could not make her forget her relation to the land of Israel. Note, Though there be a reason for our being in bad places, yet, when the reason ceases, we must by no means continue in them. Forced absence from God's ordinances, and forced presence with wicked people, are great afflictions; but when the force ceases, and such a situation is continued of choice, then it becomes a great sin. It should seem she began to think of returning immediately upon the death of her two sons, (1.) Because she looked upon that affliction to be a

judgment upon her family for lingering in the country of Moab; and hearing this to be the *voice of the rod, and of him that appointed it*, she obeys and returns. Had she returned upon the death of her husband, perhaps she might have saved the life of her sons; but, *when God judgeth he will overcome*, and, if one affliction prevail not to awaken us to a sight and sense of sin and duty, another shall. When death comes into a family it ought to be improved for the reforming of what is amiss in the family: when relations are taken away from us we are put upon enquiry whether, in some instance or other, we are not out of the way of our duty, that we may return to it. God *calls our sins to remembrance* when he *slays a son*, 1 Kings xvii. 18. And, if he thus hedge up our way with thorns, it is that he may oblige us to say, *We will go and return to our first husband*, as Naomi here to her country, Hos. ii. 7. (2.) Because the land of Moab had now become a melancholy place to her. It is with little pleasure that she can breathe in that air in which her husband and sons had expired, or go on that ground in which they lay buried out of her sight, but not out of her thoughts; now she will go to Canaan again. Thus God takes away from us the comforts we stay ourselves too much upon and solace ourselves too much in, here in the land of our sojourning, that we may think more of our home in the other world, and by faith and hope may hasten towards it. Earth is embittered to us, that heaven may be endeared.

II. The good affection which her daughters-in-law, and one of them especially, bore to her, and her generous return of their good affection.

1. They were both so kind as to accompany her, some part of the way at least, when she returned towards the land of Judah. Her two daughters-in-law did not go about to persuade her to continue in the land of Moab, but, if she was resolved to go home, would pay her all possible civility and respect at parting; and this was one instance of it: they would *bring her on her way*, at least, to the utmost limits of their country, and help her to carry her luggage as far as they went, for it does not appear that she had any servant to attend her, *v.* 7. By this we see both that Naomi, as became an Israelite, had been very kind and obliging to them and had won their love, in which she is an example to all mothers-in-law, and that Orpah and Ruth had a just sense of her kindness, for they were willing to return it thus far. It was a sign they had dwelt together in unity, though *those* were dead by whom the relation between them came. Though they retained an affection for the gods of Moab (*v.* 15), and Naomi was still faithful to the God of Israel, yet that was no hindrance to either side from love and kindness, and all the good offices that the relation required. Mothers-

in-law and daughters-in-law are too often at variance (Matt. x. 35), and therefore it is the more commendable if they live in love; let all who sustain this relation aim at the praise of doing so.

2. When they had gone a little way with her Naomi, with a great deal of affection, urged them to go back (v. 8, 9): *Return each to her mother's house.* When they were dislodged by a sad providence from the house of their husbands it was a mercy to them that they had their parents yet living, that they had their houses to go to, where they might be welcome and easy, and were not turned out to the wide world. Naomi suggests that their own mothers would be more agreeable to them than a mother-in-law, especially when their own mothers had houses and their mother-in-law was not sure she had a place to lay her head in which she could call her own. She dismisses them,

(1.) With commendation. This is a debt owing to those who have conducted themselves well in any relation, they ought to have the praise of it: *You have dealt kindly with the dead and with me*, that is, "You were good wives to your husbands that are gone, and have been good daughters to me, and not wanting to your duty in either relation." Note, When we and our relations are parting, by death or otherwise, it is very comfortable if we have both their testimony and the testimony of our own consciences for us that while we were together we carefully endeavoured to do our duty in the relation. This will help to allay the bitterness of parting; and, while we are together, we should labour so to conduct ourselves as that when we part we may not have cause to reflect with regret upon our miscarriages in the relation.

(2.) With prayer. It is very proper for friends, when they part, to part with prayer. She sends them home with her blessing; and the blessing of a mother-in-law is not to be slighted. In this blessing she twice mentions the name *Jehovah*, Israel's God, and the only true God, that she might direct her daughters to look up to him as the only fountain of all good. To him she prays in general that he would recompense to them the kindness they had shown to her and hers. It may be expected and prayed for in faith that God will deal kindly with those that have dealt kindly with their relations. *He that watereth shall be watered also himself.* And, in particular, that they might be happy in marrying again: *The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.* Note, [1.] It is very fit that, according to the apostle's direction (1 Tim. v. 14), the younger women, and he speaks there of young widows, should marry, bear children, and guide the house. And it is a pity that those who have approved themselves good wives should not again be blessed

with good husbands, especially those that like these widows have no children. [2.] The married state is a state of rest, such rest as this world affords, rest in the house of a husband, more than can be expected in the house of a mother or a mother-in-law. [3.] This rest is God's gift. If any content and satisfaction be found in our outward condition, God must be acknowledged in it. There are those that are unequally yoked that find little rest even in the house of a husband. Their affliction ought to make those the more thankful to whom the relation is comfortable. Yet let God be the rest of the soul, and no perfect rest thought of on this side heaven.

(3.) She dismissed them with great affection: *She kissed them*, wished she had somewhat better to give them, but silver and gold she had none. However, this parting kiss shall be the seal of such a true friendship as (though she never see them more) she will, while she lives, retain the pleasing remembrance of. If relations must part, let them thus part in love, that they may (if they never meet again in this world) meet in the world of everlasting love.

3. The two young widows could not think of parting with their good mother-in-law, so much had the good conversation of that pious Israelite won upon them. They not only lifted up their voice and wept, as loth to part, but they professed a resolution to adhere to her (v. 10): "*Surely we will return with thee unto thy people, and take our lot with thee.*" It is a rare instance of affection to a mother-in-law and an evidence that they had, for her sake, conceived a good opinion of the people of Israel. Even Orpah, who afterwards went back to her gods, now seemed resolved to go forward with Naomi. The sad ceremony of parting, and the tears shed on that occasion, drew from her this protestation, but it did not hold. Strong passions, without a settled judgment, commonly produce weak resolutions.

4. Naomi sets herself to dissuade them from going along with her, v. 11—13.

(1.) Naomi urges her afflicted condition. If she had had any sons in Canaan, or any near kinsmen, whom she could have expected to marry the widows, to *raise up seed* to those that were gone, and to redeem the mortgaged estate of the family, it might have been some encouragement to them to hope for a comfortable settlement at Bethlehem. But she had no sons, nor could she think of any near kinsman likely to do the kinsman's part, and therefore argues that she was never likely to have any sons to be husbands for them, for she was too old to have a husband; it became her age to think of dying and going out of the world, not of marrying and beginning the world again. Or, if she had a husband, she could not expect to have children, nor, if she had sons, could she think that these young widows would stay unmarried till her

sens that should yet be born would grow up to be marriageable. Yet this was not all: she could not only not propose to herself to marry them like themselves, but she knew not how to maintain them like themselves. The greatest grievance of that poor condition to which she was reduced was that she was not in a capacity to do for them as she would: *It grieveth me more for your sakes than for my own that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.* Observe, [1.] She judges herself chiefly aimed at in the affliction, that God's quarrel was principally with her: "*The hand of the Lord has gone out against me.* I am the sinner; it is with me that God has a controversy; it is with me that he is contending; I take it to myself." This well becomes us when we are under affliction; though many others share in the trouble, yet we must hear the voice of the rod as if it spoke only against us and to us, not billeting the rebukes of it at other people's houses, but taking them to ourselves. [2.] She laments most the trouble that redounded to them from it. She was the sinner, but they were the sufferers: *It grieveth me much for your sakes.* A gracious generous spirit can better bear its own burden than it can bear to see it a grievance to others, or others in any way drawn into trouble by it. Naomi could more easily want herself than see her daughters want. "Therefore *turn again, my daughters, for, alas! I am in no capacity to do you any kindness.*" But,

(2.) Did Naomi do well thus to discourage her daughters from going with her, when, by taking them with her, she might save them from the idolatry of Moab and bring them to the faith and worship of the God of Israel? Naomi, no doubt, desired to do so. But, [1.] If they did come with her, she would not have them to come upon her account. Those that take upon them a profession of religion only in complaisance to their relations, to oblige their friends, or for the sake of company, will be converts of small value and of short continuance. [2.] If they did come with her, she would have them to make it their deliberate choice, and to sit down first and count the cost, as it concerns those to do that may take up a profession of religion. It is good for us to be told the worst. Our Saviour took this course with him who, in the heat of zeal, spoke that bold word, *Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.* "Come, come," says Christ, "canst thou fare as I fare? *The Son of man has not where to lay his head;* know this, and then consider whether thou canst find in thy heart to take thy lot with him," Matt. viii. 19, 20. Thus Naomi deals with her daughters-in-law. Thoughts ripened into resolves by serious consideration are likely to be kept always in the imagination of the heart, whereas what is soon ripe is soon rotten.

5. Orpah was easily persuaded to yield to

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her own corrupt inclination, and to go back to her country, her kindred, and her father's house, now when she stood fair for an effectual call from it. They both *lifted up their voice and wept again* (v. 14), being much affected with the tender things that Naomi had said. But it had a different effect upon them: to Orpah it was a savour of death unto death; the representation Naomi had made of the inconveniences they must count upon if they went forward to Canaan sent her back to the country of Moab, and served her as an excuse for her apostasy; but, on the contrary, it strengthened Ruth's resolution, and her good affection to Naomi, with whose wisdom and goodness she was never so charmed as she was upon this occasion; thus to her it was a savour of life unto life. (1.) *Orpah kissed her mother-in-law*, that is, took an affectionate leave of her, bade her farewell for ever, without any purpose to follow her hereafter, as he that said he would follow Christ when he had buried his father or bidden those farewell that were at home. Orpah's kiss showed she had an affection for Naomi and was loth to part from her; yet she did not love her well enough to leave her country for her sake. Thus many have a value and affection for Christ, and yet come short of salvation by him, because they cannot find in their hearts to forsake other things for him. They love him and yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better. Thus the young man that went away from Christ went away sorrowful, Matt. xix. 22. But, (2.) *Ruth clave unto her.* Whether, when she came from home, she was resolved to go forward with her or no does not appear; perhaps she was before determined what to do, out of a sincere affection for the God of Israel and to his law, of which, by the good instructions of Naomi, she had some knowledge.

6. Naomi persuades Ruth to go back, urging, as a further inducement, her sister's example (v. 15): *Thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people, and therefore of course gone back to her gods;* for, whatever she might do while she lived with her mother-in-law, it would be next to impossible for her to show any respect to the God of Israel when she went to live among the worshippers of Chemosh. Those that forsake the communion of saints, and return to the people of Moab, will certainly break off their communion with God, and embrace the idols of Moab. Now, *return thou after thy sister*, that is, "If ever thou wilt return, return now. This is the greatest trial of thy constancy; stand this trial, and thou art mine for ever." Such offences as that of Orpah's revolt must needs come, that those who are perfect and sincere may be made manifest, as Ruth was upon this occasion.

7. Ruth puts an end to the debate by a most solemn profession of her immovable re-

solution never to forsake her, nor to return to her own country and her old relations again, v. 16, 17.

(1.) Nothing could be said more fine, more brave, than this. She seems to have had another spirit, and another speech, now that her sister had gone, and it is an instance of the grace of God inclining the soul to the resolute choice of the better part. *Draw me thus, and we will run after thee.* Her mother's dissuasions made her the more resolute; as when Joshua said to the people, *You cannot serve the Lord,* they said it with the more vehemence, *Nay, but we will.* [1.] She begs of her mother-in-law to say no more against her going: *Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee;* for all thy entreaties now cannot shake that resolution which thy instructions formerly have wrought in me, and therefore let me hear no more of them." Note, It is a great vexation and uneasiness to those that are resolved for God and religion to be tempted and solicited to alter their resolution. Those that would not think of it would not hear of it. *Entreat me not.* The margin reads it, *Be not against me.* Note, We are to reckon those against us, and really our enemies, that would hinder us in our way to the heavenly Canaan. Our relations they may be, but they cannot be our friends, that would dissuade us from and discourage us in the service of God and the work of religion. [2.] She is very particular in her resolution to cleave to her and never to forsake her; and she speaks the language of one resolved for God and heaven. She is so in love, not with her mother's beauty, or riches, or gaiety (all these were withered and gone), but with her wisdom, and virtue, and grace, which remained with her, even in her present poor and melancholy condition, that she resolves to cleave to her. *First,* She will travel with her: *Whither thou goest I will go,* though to a country I never saw and in a low and ill opinion of which I have been trained up; though far from my own country, yet with thee every road shall be pleasant. *Secondly,* She will dwell with her: *"Where thou lodgest I will lodge,* though it be in a cottage, nay, though it be no better a lodging than Jacob had when he had the stones for his pillow. *Where thou settest up thy staff I will set up mine, be it where it may."* *Thirdly,* She will twist interests with her: *Thy people shall be my people.* From Naomi's character she concludes certainly that that great nation was a wise and an understanding people. She judges of them all by her good mother, who, wherever she went, was a credit to her country (as all those should study to be who profess relation to the better country, that is, the heavenly), and therefore she will think herself happy if she may be reckoned one of them. "Thy people shall be mine to associate with, to be conformable to, and to be concerned for." *Fourthly,* She will join in

religion with her. Thus she determined to be hers *usque ad aras—to the very altars:* "Thy God shall be my God, and farewell to all the gods of Moab, which are vanity and a lie. I will adore the God of Israel, the only living and true God, trust in him alone, serve him, and in every thing be ruled by him;" this is to take the Lord for our God. *Fifthly,* She will gladly die in the same bed: *Where thou diest will I die.* She takes it for granted they must both die, and that in all probability Naomi, as the elder, would die first, and resolves to continue in the same house, if it might be, till her days also were fulfilled, intimating likewise a desire to partake of her happiness in death; she wishes to die in the same place, in token of her dying after the same manner. "Let me die the death of righteous Naomi, and let my last end be like hers." *Sixthly,* She will desire to be buried in the same grave, and to lay her bones by hers: *There will I be buried,* not desiring to have so much as her dead body carried back to the country of Moab, in token of any remaining kindness for it; but, Naomi and she having joined souls, she desires they may mingle dust, in hopes of rising together, and being together for ever in the other world. [3.] She backs her resolution to adhere to Naomi with a solemn oath: *The Lord do so to me, and more also* (which was an ancient form of imprecation), *if aught but death part thee and me.* An oath for confirmation was an end of this strife, and would leave a lasting obligation upon her never to forsake that good way she was now making choice of. *First,* It is implied that death would separate between them for a time. She could promise to die and be buried in the same place, but not at the same time: it might so happen that she might die first, and this would part them. Note, Death parts those whom nothing else will part. A dying hour is a parting hour, and should be so thought of by us and prepared for. *Secondly,* It is resolved that nothing else should part them; not any kindness from her own family and people, nor any hope of preferment among them, nor any unkindness from Israel, nor the fear of poverty and disgrace among them. "No, I will never leave thee." Now,

(2.) This is a pattern of a resolute convert to God and religion. Thus must we be at a point. [1.] We must take the Lord for our God. "This God is my God for ever and ever; I have avouched him for mine." [2.] When we take God for our God we must take his people for our people in all conditions; though they be a poor despised people, yet, if they be his, they must be ours. [3.] Having cast in our lot among them, we must be willing to take our lot with them and to fare as they fare. We must submit to the same yoke and draw in it faithfully, take up the same cross and carry it cheerfully, go where God will have us to go, though it should be into banishment, and lodge where

he will have us to lodge, though it be in a prison, die where he will have us die, and lay our bones in the graves of the upright, who enter into peace and rest in their beds, though they be but the *graves of the common people*. [4.] We must resolve to continue and persevere, and herein our adherence to Christ must be closer than that of Ruth to Naomi. She resolved that nothing but death should separate them; but we must resolve that death itself shall not separate us from our duty to Christ, and then we may be sure that death itself shall not separate us from our happiness in Christ. [5.] We must bind our souls with a bond never to break these pious resolutions, and swear unto the Lord that we will cleave to him. Fast bind, fast find. He that means honestly does not startle at assurances.

5. Naomi is hereby silenced (*v. 18*): *When she saw that Ruth was stedfastly minded to go with her* (which was the very thing she aimed at in all that she had said, to make her of a stedfast mind in going with her), when she saw that she had gained her point, she was well satisfied, and *left off speaking to her*. She could desire no more than that solemn protestation which Ruth had just now made. See the power of resolution, how it puts temptation to silence. Those that are unresolved, and go in religious ways without a stedfast mind, tempt the tempter, and stand like a door half open, which invites a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door, resists the devil, and forces him to flee.

The Chaldee paraphrase thus relates the debate between Naomi and Ruth:—Ruth said, *Entreat me not to leave thee, for I will be a proselyte*. Naomi said, *We are commanded to keep sabbaths and good days, on which we may not travel above 2000 cubits—a sabbath-day's journey*. Well, said Ruth, *whither thou goest I will go*. Naomi said, *We are commanded not to tarry all night with Gentiles*. Well, said Ruth, *where thou lodgest I will lodge*. Naomi said, *We are commanded to keep 613 precepts*. Well, said Ruth, *whatever thy people keep I will keep, for they shall be my people*. Naomi said, *We are forbidden to worship any strange god*. Well, said Ruth, *thy God shall be my God*. Naomi said, *We have four sorts of deaths for malefactors, stoning, burning, strangling, and slaying with the sword*. Well, said Ruth, *where thou diest I will die*. *We have*, said Naomi, *houses of sepulchre*. *And there*, said Ruth, *will I be buried*.

19 So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, *Is this Naomi?* 20 And she said unto them, *Call me not Naomi, call me*

*Mara*: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Naomi and Ruth, after many a weary step (the fatigue of the journey, we may suppose, being somewhat relieved by the good instructions Naomi gave to her proselyte and the good discourse they had together), came at last to Bethlehem. And they came very seasonably, *in the beginning of the barley-harvest*, which was the first of their harvests, that of wheat following after. Now Naomi's own eyes might convince her of the truth of what she had heard in the country of Moab, that *the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread*, and Ruth might see this good land in its best state; and now they had opportunity to provide for winter. Our *times are in God's hand*, both the events and the time of them. Notice is here taken,

1. Of the discomposure of the neighbours upon this occasion (*v. 19*): *All the city was moved about them*. Her old acquaintance gathered about her, to enquire concerning her state, and to bid her welcome to Bethlehem again. Or perhaps they were *moved about her*, lest she should be a charge to the town, she looked so bare. By this it appears that she had formerly lived respectably, else there would not have been so much notice taken of her. If those that have been in a high and prosperous condition break, or fall into poverty or disgrace, their fall is the more remarkable. And they said, *Is this Naomi?* The women of the city said it, for the word is feminine. Those with whom she had formerly been intimate were surprised to see her in this condition; she was so much broken and altered with her afflictions that they could scarcely believe their own eyes, nor think that this was the same person whom they had formerly seen, so fresh, and fair, and gay: *Is this Naomi?* So unlike is the rose when it is withered to what it was when it was blooming. What a poor figure does Naomi make now, compared with what she made in her prosperity! If any asked this question in contempt, upbraiding her with her miseries ("is this she that could not be content to fare as her neighbours did, but must ramble to a strange country? see what she has got by it!"), their temper was very base and sordid. Nothing more barbarous than to triumph over those that are fallen. But we may sup-

pose that the generality asked it in compassion and commiseration: "Is this she that lived so plentifully, and kept so good a house, and was so charitable to the poor? *How has the gold become dim!*" Those that had seen the magnificence of the first temple wept when they saw the meanness of the second; so these here. Note, Afflictions will make great and surprising changes in a little time. When we see how sickness and old age alter people, change their countenance and temper, we may think of what the Bethlehemitess said: "*Is this Naomi?*" One would not take it to be the same person." God, by his grace, fit us for all such changes, especially the great change!

11. Of the composure of Naomi's spirit. If some upbraided her with her poverty, she was not moved against them, as she would have been if she had been poor and proud; but, with a great deal of pious patience, bore that and all the other melancholy effects of her affliction (v. 20, 21): *Call me not Naomi, call me Mara*, &c. "*Naomi signifies pleasant or amiable; but all my pleasant things are laid waste; call me Mara, bitter or bitterness, for I am now a woman of a sorrowful spirit.*" Thus does she bring her mind to her condition, which we all ought to do when our condition is not in every thing to our mind. Observe,

1. The change of her state, and how it is described, with a pious regard to the divine providence, and without any passionate murmurings or complaints. (1.) It was a very sad and melancholy change. She *went out full*; so she thought herself when she had her husband with her and two sons. Much of the fulness of our comfort in this world arises from agreeable relations. But she now *came home again empty*, a widow and childless, and probably had sold her goods, and of all the effects she took with her brought home no more than the clothes on her back. So uncertain is all that which we call fulness in the creature, 1 Sam. ii. 5. Even in the fulness of that sufficiency we may be in straits. But there is a fulness, a spiritual and divine fulness, which we can never be emptied of, a good part which shall not be *taken from those that have it*. (2.) She acknowledges the hand of God, his mighty hand, in the affliction. "*It is the Lord that has brought me home again empty; it is the Almighty that has afflicted me.*" Note, Nothing conduces more to satisfy a gracious soul under an affliction than the consideration of the hand of God in it. *It is the Lord*, 1 Sam. iii. 18; Job i. 21. Especially to consider that he who afflicts us is *Shaddai*, the Almighty, with whom it is folly to contend and to whom it is our duty and interest to submit. It is that name of God by which he enters into covenant with his people: *I am God Almighty, God All-sufficient*, Gen. xvii. 1. He afflicts as a God in covenant, and his all-sufficiency may be our support and supply

under all our afflictions. He that empties us of the creature knows how to fill us with himself. (3.) She speaks very feelingly of the impression which the affliction had made upon her: *He has dealt very bitterly with me*. The cup of affliction is a bitter cup, and even that which afterwards *yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness*, yet, for the present, is *not joyous, but grievous*, Heb. xii. 11. Job complains, *Thou writest bitter things against me*, Job xiii. 26. (4.) She owns the affliction to come from God as a controversy: *The Lord hath testified against me*. Note, When God corrects us he *testifies against us* and contends with us (Job x. 17), intimating that he is displeased with us. Every rod has a voice, the voice of a witness.

2. The compliance of her spirit with this change: "*Call me not Naomi*, for I am no more pleasant, either to myself or to my friends; *but call me Mara*, a name more agreeable to my present state." Many that are debased and impoverished yet affect to be called by the empty names and titles of honour they have formerly enjoyed. Naomi did not so. Her humility regards not a glorious name in a dejected state. If God deal bitterly with her, she will accommodate herself to the dispensation, and is willing to be called *Mara, bitter*. Note, It well becomes us to have our hearts humbled under humbling providences. When our condition is brought down our spirits should be brought down with it. And then our troubles are sanctified to us when we thus comport with them; for it is not an affliction itself, but an affliction rightly borne, that does us good. *Perdidisti tot mala, si nondum misera esse didicisti—So many calamities have been lost upon you if you have not yet learned how to suffer*. Sen ad Helv. *Tribulation works patience*.

## CHAP. II.

There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred history that stoops so low as this to take cognizance of so mean a person as Ruth, a poor Moabitish widow, so mean an action as her gleaning corn in a neighbour's field, and the minute circumstances thereof. But all this was in order to her being grafted into the line of Christ and taken in among his ancestors, that she might be a figure of the espousals of the Gentile church to Christ, Isa. liv. 1. This makes the story remarkable; and many of the passages of it are instructive and very improbable. Here we have, I. Ruth's humility and industry in gleaning corn, Providence directing her to Boaz's field, ver. 1-3. II. The great favour which Boaz showed to her in many instances, ver. 4-16. III. The return of Ruth to her mother-in-law, ver. 18-23.

AND Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. 3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field be-

longing unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

Naomi had now gained a settlement in Bethlehem among her old friends; and here we have an account,

I. Of her rich kinsman, Boaz, a *mighty man of wealth*, v. 1. The Chaldee reads it, *mighty in the law*. If he was both, it was a most rare and excellent conjunction, to be mighty in wealth and mighty in the scriptures too; those that are so are mighty indeed. He was grandson of Nahshon, who was prince of the tribe of Judah in the wilderness, and son of Salmon, probably a younger son, by Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. He carries might in his name, *Boaz—in him is strength*; and he was of the family of Elimelech, that family which was now reduced and brought so low. Observe, 1. Boaz, though a rich and great man, had poor relations. Every branch of the tree is not a top-branch. Let not those that are great in the world be ashamed to own their kindred that are mean and despised, lest they be found therein proud, scornful, and unnatural. 2. Naomi, though a poor contemptible widow, had rich relations, whom yet she boasted not of, nor was burdensome to, nor expected any thing from when she returned to Bethlehem in distress. Those that have rich relations, while they themselves are poor, ought to know that it is the wise providence of God that makes the difference (in which we ought to acquiesce), and that to be proud of our relation to such is a great sin, and to trust to it is great folly.

II. Of her poor daughter-in-law, Ruth. 1. Her condition was very low and poor, which was a great trial to the faith and constancy of a young proselyte. The Bethlehemites would have done well if they had invited Naomi and her daughter-in-law first to one good house and then to another (it would have been a great support to an aged widow and a great encouragement to a new convert); but, instead of tasting the dainties of Canaan, they have no way of getting necessary food but by gleaning corn, and otherwise, for aught that appears, they might have starved. Note, *God has chosen the poor of this world*; and poor they are likely to be, for, though God has chosen them, commonly men overlook them. 2. Her character, in this condition, was very good (v. 2): *She said to Naomi*, not, "Let me now go to the land of Moab again, for there is no living here, here there is want, but *in my father's house there is bread enough*." No, she is not *mindful of the country from which she came out*, otherwise she had now a fair occasion to return. The God of Israel shall be her God, and, though he slay her, yet will she trust in him and never forsake him. But her request is, *Let me go to the field, and glean ears of corn*. Those that are well born, and have been well brought up, know not what straits they may

be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be obliged to get their bread by, Lam. iv 5. When the case is thus melancholy, let Ruth be remembered, who is a great example, (1.) Of humility. When Providence had made her poor she did not say, "To glean, which is in effect to beg, I am ashamed," but cheerfully stoops to the meanness of her circumstances and accommodates herself to her lot. High spirits can more easily starve than stoop; Ruth was none of those. She does not tell her mother she was never brought up to live upon crumbs. Though she was not brought up to it, she is brought down to it, and is not uneasy at it. Nay, it is her own motion, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one of the brightest ornaments of youth, and one of the best omens. Before Ruth's honour was this humility. Observe how humbly she speaks of herself, in her expectation of leave to glean: *Let me glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace*. She does not say, "I will go and glean, and surely nobody will deny me the liberty," but, "I will go and glean, in the hope that somebody will allow me the liberty." Note, Poor people must not demand kindness as a debt, but humbly ask it, and take it as a favour, though in ever so small a matter. It becomes the poor to use entreaties. (2.) Of industry. She does not say to her mother-in-law, "Let me now go a visiting to the ladies of the town, or go a walking in the fields to take the air and be merry; I cannot sit all day moping with you." No, it is not sport, but business, that her heart is upon: "*Let me go and glean ears of corn*, which will turn to some good account." She was one of those virtuous women that love not to eat the bread of idleness, but love to take pains. This is an example to young people. Let them learn betimes to labour, and, *what their hand finds to do, do it with their might*. A disposition to diligence bodes well both for this world and the other. Love not sleep, love not sport, love not sauntering; but love business. It is also an example to poor people to work for their living, and not beg that which they are able to earn. We must not be shy of any honest employment, though it be mean, *ἔργον οὐδὲν ἀνάξιον*—*No labour is a reproach*. Sin is a thing below us, but we must not think any thing else so that Providence calls us to. (3.) Of regard to her mother. Though she was but her mother-in-law, and, though, being loosed by death from the law of her husband, she might easily suppose herself thereby loosed from the law of her husband's mother, yet she is dutifully observant of her. She will not go out without letting her know and asking her leave. This respect young people ought to show to their parents and governors; it is part of the honour due to them. She did not say, "Mother, if you will go with me, I will go glean;" but, "Do you sit at

home and take your ease, and I will go abroad, and take pains." *Juniores ad labores—Youth should work.* Let young people take advice from the aged, but not put them upon toil. (4.) Of dependence upon Providence, intimated in that, I will glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace. She knows not which way to go, nor whom to enquire for, but will trust Providence to raise her up some friend or other that will be kind to her. Let us always keep up good thoughts of the divine providence, and believe that while we do well it will do well for us. And it did well for Ruth; for when she went out alone, without guide or companion, to glean, her hap was to light on the field of Boaz. r. 3. To her it seemed casual. She knew not whose field it was, nor had she any reason for going to that more than any other, and therefore it is said to be her hap; but Providence directed her steps to this field. Note, God wisely orders small events; and those that seem altogether contingent serve his own glory and the good of his people. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn, which seemed fortuitous to us, but was directed by Providence with design.

4 And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. 5 Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? 6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: 7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she carried a little in the house. 8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: 9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. 10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a

stranger? 11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. 12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. 13 Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. 14 And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. 15 And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: 16 And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

Now Boaz himself appears, and a great deal of decency there appears in his carriage both towards his own servants and towards this poor stranger.

1. Towards his own servants, and those that were employed for him in reaping and gathering in his corn. Harvest-time is busy time, many hands must then be at work. Boaz that had much, being a mighty man of wealth, had much to do, and consequently many to work under him and to live upon him. *As goods are increased those are increased that eat them, and what good has the owner thereof save the beholding of them with his eyes?* Boaz is here an example of a good master.

1. He had a servant that was set over the reapers, r. 6. In great families it is requisite there should be one to oversee the rest of the servants, and appoint to each their portion both of work and meat. Ministers are such servants in God's house, and it is requisite that they be both wise and faithful, and show their Lord all things, as he here, r. 6.

2. Yet he came himself to his reapers, to see how the work went forward, if he found any thing amiss to rectify it, and to give further orders what should be done. This



was both for his own interest (he that wholly leaves his business to others will have it done by the halves; the master's eye makes a fat horse) and it was also for the encouragement of his servants, who would go on the more cheerfully in their work when their master countenanced them so far as to make them a visit. Masters that live at ease should think with tenderness of those that toil for them and bear the burden and heat of the day.

3. Kind and pious salutations were interchanged between Boaz and his reapers.

(1.) He said to them, *The Lord be with you*; and they replied, *The Lord bless thee, v. 4*. Hereby they expressed, [1.] Their mutual respect to each other; he to them as good servants, and they to him as a good master. When he came to them he did not fall a chiding them, as if he came only to find fault and exercise his authority, but he prayed for them: "*The Lord be with you, prosper you, and give you health and strength, and preserve you from any disaster.*" Nor did they, as soon as ever he was out of hearing, fall a cursing him, as some ill-natured servants that hate their master's eye, but they returned his courtesy: "*The Lord bless thee, and make our labours serviceable to thy prosperity.*" Things are likely to go on well in a house where there is such good-will as this between master and servants. [2.] Their joint-dependence upon the divine providence. They express their kindness to each other by praying one for another. They show not only their courtesy, but their piety, and acknowledgment that all good comes from the presence and blessing of God, which therefore we should value and desire above any thing else both for ourselves and others.

(2.) Let us hence learn to use, [1.] Courteous salutations, as expressions of a sincere good-will to our friends. [2.] Pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for his favour, in such short prayers as these. Only we must take heed that they do not degenerate into formality, lest in them we take the name of the Lord our God in vain; but, if we be serious in them, we may in them keep up our communion with God, and fetch in mercy and grace from him. It appears to have been the usual custom thus to wish reapers good speed, Ps. cxxix. 7, 8.

4. He took an account from his reapers concerning a stranger he met with in the field, and gave necessary orders concerning her, that they should not touch her (v. 9) nor reproach her, v. 15. Masters must take care, not only that they do no hurt themselves, but that they suffer not their servants and those under them to do hurt. He also ordered them to be kind to her, and let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her. Though it is fit that masters should restrain and rebuke their servants' wastefulness, yet they should not tie them up from being charitable, but give them allowance for that, with prudent directions.

II. Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and showed her a great deal of favour, induced to it by the account he had of her, and what he observed concerning her, God also inclining his heart to countenance her. Coming among his reapers, he observed this stranger among them, and got intelligence from his steward who she was, and here is a very particular account of what passed concerning her.

1. The steward gave to Boaz a very fair account of her, proper to recommend her to his favour, v. 6, 7. (1.) That she was a stranger, and therefore one of those that by the law of God were to gather the gleanings of the harvest, Lev. xix. 9, 10. She is the Moabitish damsel. (2.) That she was allied to his family; she came back with Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, a kinsman of Boaz. (3.) That she was a proselyte, for she came out of the country of Moab to settle in the land of Israel. (4.) That she was very modest, and had not gleaned till she had asked leave. (5.) That she was very industrious, and had continued close to her work from morning even until now. And the poor that are industrious and willing to take pains are fit to be encouraged. Now, in the heat of the day, she tarried a little in the house or booth that was set up in the field for shelter from the weather to repose herself, and some suggest that it is probable she retired for her devotion. But she soon came back to her work, and, except that little intermission, kept close to it all day, though it was not what she had been used to. Servants should be just in the character and reports they give to their masters, and take heed they do not misrepresent any person, nor without cause discourage their master's charity.

2. Boaz was hereupon extremely civil to her in divers instances. (1.) He ordered her to attend his reapers in every field they gathered in and not to glean in the field of another, for she should not need to go any where else to better herself (v. 8): *Abide here fast by my maidens*; for those of her own sex were the fittest company for her. (2.) He charged all his servants to be very tender of her and respectful to her, and no doubt they would be so to one to whom they saw their master kind. She was a stranger, and it is probable her language, dress, and mien differed much from theirs; but he charged them that they should not in any thing affront her, or be abusive to her, as rude servants are too apt to be to strangers. (3.) He had her welcome to the entertainment he had provided for his own servants. He ordered her, not only to drink of the water which was drawn for them (for that seems to be the liquor he means (v. 9), drawn from the famous well of Beth-lehem which was by the gate, the water of which David longed for, 2 Sam. xxiii. 15), but at meal-time to come and eat of their bread (v. 14), yea, and she should be welcome to their sauce too: *Come, dip thy morsel in the*

*rinegar*, to make it savoury: for God allows us not only nourishing but relishing food, not for necessity only, but for delight. And for encouragement to her, and direction to the servants, he himself, happening to be present when the reapers sat down to meat, reached her parched corn to eat. It is no disparagement to the finest hand to be reached forth to the needy (Prov. xxxi. 20), and to be employed in serving the poor. Observe, Boaz was not scanty in his provision for his reapers, but sent them so much more than enough for themselves as would be entertainment for a stranger. Thus *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*. (4.) He commended her for her dutiful respect to her mother-in-law, which, though he did not know her by sight, yet he had heard of (v. 11): *It has been fully shown me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law*. Note, Those that do well ought to have the praise of it. But that which especially he commended her for was that she had left her own country, and had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion; for so the Chaldee expounds it: "Thou hast come to be proselyted, and to dwell among a people whom thou knowest not." Those that leave all, to embrace the true religion, are worthy of double honour. (5.) He prayed for her (v. 12): *The Lord recompense thy work*. Her strong affection to the commonwealth of Israel, to which she was by birth an alien, was such a work of the divine grace in her as would certainly be crowned with a full reward by him *under whose wings she had come to trust*. Note, Those that by faith come under the wings of the divine grace, and have a full complacency and confidence in that grace, may be sure of a full recompence of reward for their so doing. From this expression, the Jews describe a proselyte to be one that is *gathered under the wings of the divine majesty*. (6.) He encouraged her to go on in her gleaning, and did not offer to take her off from that; for the greatest kindness we can do our poor relations is to assist and encourage their industry. Boaz ordered his servants to let her glean among the sheaves, where other gleaners were not allowed to come, and not to reproach her, that is, not to call her *thief*, or to suspect her of taking more than was allowed her, v. 15. All this shows Boaz to have been a man of a generous spirit, and one that, according to the law, considered the heart of a stranger.

3. Ruth received his favours with a great deal of humility and gratitude, and conducted herself with as much propriety in her place as he did himself in his, but little thinking that she should shortly be the mistress of that field she was now gleaning in. (1.) She paid all possible respect to him, and gave him honour, according to the usage of the country (v. 10): *She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground*. Note, Good breeding is a great ornament to religion; and we must

render honour to whom honour is due. (2.) She humbly owned herself unworthy of his favours: "*I am a stranger* (v. 10) and *not like one of thy handmaids* (v. 13), not so well dressed nor so well taught, not so neat nor so handy." Note, It well becomes us all to think meanly of ourselves, and to take notice of that in ourselves which is diminishing, esteeming others better than ourselves. (3.) She gratefully acknowledged his kindness to her; though it was no great expense to him, nor much more than what he was obliged to by the divine law, yet she magnifies and admires it: *Why have I found grace in thy eyes?* v. 10. (4.) She begs the continuance of his good-will: *Let me find favour in thy sight* (v. 13), and owns that what he had said had been a cordial to her: *Thou hast comforted me, for that thou hast spoken friendly to me*. Those that are great, and in high places, know not how much good they may do to their inferiors with a kind look or by speaking friendly to them; and so small an expense, one would think, they should not grudge, when it shall be put upon the score of their charity. (5.) When Boaz gave her her dinner with his reapers she only ate so much as would suffice her, and left the rest, and immediately rose up to glean, r. 14, 15. She did not, under pretence either of her want or of her labour, eat more than was convenient for her, nor so much as to unfit her for work in the afternoon. Temperance is a friend to industry; and we must eat and drink to strengthen us for business, not to indispose us to it.

17 So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. 19 And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. 20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. 21 And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my

young men, until they have ended all my harvest. 22 And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, *It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.* 23 So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.

Here, I. Ruth finishes her day's work, v. 17.

1. She took care not to lose time, for she gleaned until evening. We must not be weary of well-doing, because in due season we shall reap. She did not make an excuse to sit still, or go home, till the evening. Let us *work the works of him that sent us, while it is day.* She scarcely used, much less did she abuse, the kindness of Boaz; for, though he ordered his servants to leave handfuls for her, she continued to glean the scattered ears. 2. She took care not to lose what she had gathered, but threshed it herself, that she might the more easily carry it home, and might have it ready for use. *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting, and so loseth the benefit of it, but the substance of a diligent man is precious,* Prov. xii. 27. Ruth had gathered it ear by ear, but, when she had put it all together, it was an ephah of barley, about four pecks. Many a little makes a great deal. It is an encouragement to industry that in all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit, but the *talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.* When she had got her corn into as little compass as she could, she took it up herself, and carried it into the city, though, had she asked them, it is likely some of Boaz's servants would have done that for her. We should study to be as little as possible troublesome to those that are kind to us. She did not think it either too hard or too mean a service to carry her corn herself into the city, but was rather pleased with what she had gotten by her own industry, and careful to secure it; and let us thus take care that we *lose not those things which we have wrought,* which we have gained, 2 John 8.

II. She paid her respects to her mother-in-law, went straight home to her and did not go to converse with Boaz's servants, *showed her what she had gleaned,* that she might see she had not been idle.

1. She entertained her with what she had left of the good dinner Boaz had given her. She gave to her what she had reserved, after she was sufficed (v. 18), which refers to v. 14. If she had any thing better than another, her mother should have part with her. Thus, having shown industry abroad, she showed piety at home; so children's maintaining their parents is called (1 Tim. v. 4), and it is part of the honour due to them by the fifth commandment, Matt. xv. 6.

2. She gave her an account of her day's work, and how a kind providence had favoured her in it, which made it very comfortable to her; for the gleanings that a righteous man hath are better than the harvests of many wicked, Ps. xxxvii. 16. (1.) Naomi asked her where she had been: *Where hast thou gleaned to-day?* Note, Parents should take care to enquire into the ways of their children, how, and where, and in what company they spend their time. This may prevent many extravagancies which children, left to themselves, run into, by which they bring both themselves and their parents to shame. If we are not our brethren's, yet surely we are our children's keepers: and we know what a son Adonijah proved, that had never been chidden. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten nor discourage them, not so as to make them hate home or tempt them to tell a lie, but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise. It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, "*Where have I gleaned to-day?*" What improvements have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or obtained that will turn to a good account?" (2.) Ruth gave her a particular account of the kindness she had received from Boaz (v. 19) and the hopes she had of further kindness from him, he having ordered her to attend his servants throughout all the harvest, v. 21. Note, Children should look upon themselves as accountable to their parents and to those that are over them, and not think it a disparagement to them to be examined; let them *do that which is good,* and they shall have praise of the same. Ruth told her mother what kindness Boaz had shown her, that she might take some occasion or another to acknowledge it and return him thanks; but she did not tell her how Boaz had commended her, v. 11. Humility teaches us, not only not to praise ourselves, but not to be forward to publish others' praises of us. (3.) We are here told what Naomi said to it. [1.] She prayed heartily for him that had been her daughter's benefactor, even before she knew who it was (v. 19): *Blessed be he, whoever he was, that did take knowledge of thee,* shooting the arrow of prayer at a venture. But more particularly when she was told who it was (v. 20): *Blessed be he of the Lord.* Note, The poor must pray for those that are kind and liberal to them, and thus requite them, when they are not capable of making them any other requital. Let the loins of the poor bless those that refresh them, Job xxix. 13; xxxi. 20. And he that hears the cries of the poor against their oppressors (Exod. xxii. 27), it may be hoped, will hear the prayers of the poor for their benefactors. She now remembered the former kindnesses Boaz had shown to her husband and sons, and joins those to

this: he has not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. If we generously show kindness even to those that seem to have forgotten our former favours, perhaps it may help to revive the remembrance even of those which seem buried. [2.] She acquainted Ruth with the relation their family was in to Boaz: *The man is near of kin to us*. It should seem she had been so long in Moab that she had forgotten her kindred in the land of Israel, till by this providence God brought it to her mind. At least she had not told Ruth of it, though it might have been some encouragement to a young proselyte. Unlike to humble Naomi are many, who, though fallen into decay themselves, are continually boasting of their great relations. Nay, observe the chain of thought here, and in it a chain of providences, bringing about what was designed concerning Ruth. Ruth names Boaz as one that had been kind to her. Naomi bethinks herself who that should be, and presently recollects herself: "*The man is near of kin to us; now that I hear his name, I remember him very well.*" This thought brings in another: "*He is our next kinsman, our goel, that has the right to redeem our estate that was mortgaged, and therefore from him we may expect further kindness. He is the likeliest man in all Bethlehem to set us up.*" Thus God brings things to our mind, sometimes on a sudden, that prove to have a wonderful tendency to our good. [3.] She appointed Ruth to continue her attendance in the fields of Boaz (v. 22): "*Let them not meet thee in any other field, for that will be construed a contempt of his courtesy.*" Our blessed Saviour is our *Goel*; it is he that has a right to redeem. If we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to him, and his fields, and his family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with him only, and which he has encouraged us to expect from him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other shop, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Tradesmen take it ill if those that are in their books go to another shop. We lose divine favours if we slight them. Some think Naomi gave her daughter-in-law a tacit rebuke; she had spoken (r. 21) of keeping fast by the young men. "Nay," said Naomi (v. 22), "*It is good that thou go out with his maidens; they are fitter company for thee than the young men.*" But they are too critical. Ruth spoke of the young men because they were the principal labourers, and to them Boaz had given directions concerning her; and Naomi takes it for granted that, while she attended the young men, her society would be with the maidens, as was fit. Ruth dutifully observed her mother's directions; she continued to glean, to the end, not only of barley-harvest, but of the wheat-harvest, which followed it, that she might

gather food in harvest to serve for winter, Prov. vi. 6—8. She also kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, with whom she afterwards cultivated an acquaintance, which might do her service, v. 23. But she constantly came to her mother at night in due time, as became a virtuous woman, that was for working days, and not for merry nights. And when the harvest was ended (as bishop Patrick expounds it) she did not gad abroad, but kept her aged mother company at home. Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, and we know what a disgrace her vanity ended in. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her, and we shall find afterwards what preferment her humility and industry ended in. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? Honour is before him.*

## CHAP. III.

We found it very easy, in the former chapter, to applaud the decency of Ruth's behaviour, and to show what good use we may make of the account given us of it; but in this chapter we shall have much ado to vindicate it from the imputation of indecency, and to save it from having an ill use made of it; but the goodness of those times was such as saved what is recorded here from being ill done, and yet the badness of these times is such as that it will not justify any now in doing the like. Here is, I. The directions Naomi gave to her daughter-in-law how to claim Boaz for her husband, ver. 1—5. II. Ruth's punctual observance of those directions, ver. 6, 7. III. The kind and honourable treatment Boaz gave her, ver. 8—15. IV. Her return to her mother-in-law, ver. 16—18.

**T**HEN Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? 2 And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor. 3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. 4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. 5 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

Here, 1. Naomi's care for her daughter's comfort is without doubt very commendable, and is recorded for imitation. She had no thoughts of marrying herself, ch. i. 12. But, though she that was old had resolved upon a perpetual widowhood, yet she was far from the thoughts of confining her daughter-in-law to it, that was young. Age must not make itself a standard to youth. On the contrary, she is full of contrivance how to get her well married. Her wisdom projected that for her daughter which her daughter's

modesty forbade her to project for herself, v. 1. This she did, 1. In justice to the dead, to raise up seed to those that were gone, and so to preserve the family from being extinct. 2. In kindness and gratitude to her daughter-in-law, who had conducted herself very dutifully and respectfully to her. "*My daughter*" (said she, looking upon her in all respects as her own), "*shall I not seek rest for thee,*" that is, a settlement in the married state; "*shall I not get thee a good husband, that it may be well with thee,*" that is, "that thou mayest live plentifully and pleasantly, and not spend all thy days in the mean and melancholy condition we now live in?" Note, (1.) A married state is, or should be, a state of rest to young people. Wandering affections are then fixed, and the heart must be at rest. It is at rest in the house of a husband, and in his heart, *ch. i. 9.* Those are giddy indeed that marriage does not compose. (2.) That which should be desired and designed by those that enter into the married state is *that it may be well with them*, in order to which it is necessary that they choose well; otherwise, instead of being a rest to them, it may prove the greatest uneasiness. Parents, in disposing of their children, must have this in their eye, *that it may be well with them.* And be it always remembered *that is best for us which is best for our souls.* (3.) It is the duty of parents to seek this rest for their children, and to do all that is fit for them to do, in due time, in order to it. And the more dutiful and respectful they are to them, though they can the worse spare them, yet they should the rather prefer them, and the better.

II. The course she took in order to her daughter's preferment was very extraordinary and looks suspicious. If there was any thing improper in it, the fault must lie upon Naomi, who put her daughter upon it, and who knew, or should know, the laws and usages of Israel better than Ruth. 1. It was true that Boaz, being near of kin to the deceased, and (for aught that Naomi knew to the contrary) the nearest of all now alive, was obliged by the divine law to marry the widow of Mahlon, who was the eldest son of Elimelech, and was dead without issue (v. 2): "*Is not Boaz of our kindred,* and therefore bound in conscience to take care of our affairs? Why should we not remind him of his duty?" This may encourage us to lay ourselves by faith at the feet of Christ, that he is our near kinsman; having taken our nature upon him, he is *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.* 2. It was a convenient time to remind him of it, now that he had got so much acquaintance with Ruth by her constant attendance on his reapers during the whole harvest, which was now ended; and he also, by the kindness he had shown to Ruth in smaller matters, had encouraged Naomi to hope that he would not be unkind, much less unjust, in this greater. And she

thought it was a good opportunity to apply to him when he made a winnowing-feast at his threshing-floor (v. 2), then and there completing the joy of the harvest, and treating his workmen like a kind master: *He winnoweth barley to-night,* that is, he makes his entertainment to-night. As Nabal and Absalom had feasts at their sheep-shearing, so Boaz at his winnowing. 3. Naomi thought Ruth the most proper person to do it herself; and perhaps it was the usage in that country that in this case the woman should make the demand; so much is intimated by the law, Deut. xxv. 7—9. Naomi therefore orders her daughter-in-law to make herself clean and neat, not to make herself fine (v. 3): "*Wash thyself and anoint thee, not paint thee* (as Jezebel), *put on thy raiment, but not the attire of a harlot, and go down to the floor,*" whither, it is probable, she was invited to the supper there made; but she must not make herself known, that is, not make her errand known (she herself could not but be very well known among Boaz's reapers) till the company had dispersed and Boaz had retired. And upon this occasion she would have an easier access to him in private than she could have at his own house. And thus far was well enough. But, 4. Her coming to lie down at his feet, when he was asleep in his bed, had such an appearance of evil, was such an approach towards it, and might have been such an occasion of it, that we know not well how to justify it. Many expositors think it unjustifiable, particularly the excellent Mr. Poole. We must not do evil that good may come. It is dangerous to bring the spark and the tinder together; for how great a matter may a little fire kindle! All agree that it is not to be drawn into a precedent; neither our laws nor our times are the same that were then; yet I am willing to make the best of it. If Boaz was, as they presumed, the next kinsman, she was his wife before God (as we say), and there needed but little ceremony to complete the nuptials; and Naomi did not intend that Ruth should approach to him any otherwise than as his wife. She knew Boaz to be not only an old man (she would not have trusted to that alone in venturing her daughter-in-law so near him), but a grave sober man, a virtuous and religious man, and one that feared God. She knew Ruth to be a modest woman, *chaste, and a keeper at home,* Tit. ii. 5. The Israelites had indeed been once debauched by the daughters of Moab (Num. xxv. 1), but this Moabitess was none of those daughters. Naomi herself designed nothing but what was honest and honourable, and her charity (which *believeth all things and hopeth all things*) banished and forbade all suspicion that either Boaz or Ruth would attempt any thing but what was likewise honest and honourable. If what she advised had been then as indecent and immodest (according to the usage

of the country) as it seems now to us, we cannot think that if Naomi had had so little virtue (which yet we have no reason to suspect) she would also have had so little wisdom as to put her daughter upon it, since that alone might have marred the match, and have alienated the affections of so grave and good a man as Boaz from her. We must therefore think that the thing did not look so ill then as it does now. Naomi referred her daughter-in-law to Boaz for further directions. When she had thus made her claim, Boaz, who was more learned in the laws, would tell her what she must do. Thus must we lay ourselves at the feet of our Redeemer, to receive from him our doom. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6. We may be sure, if Ruth had apprehended any evil in that which her mother advised her to, she was a woman of too much virtue and too much sense to promise as she did (r. 5): *All that thou sayest unto me I will do.* Thus must the younger submit to the elder, and to their grave and prudent counsels, when they have nothing worth speaking of to object against it.

6 And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. 8 And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. 9 And he said, Who art thou? and she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. 10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. 12 And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. 13 Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kins-

man to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning.

Here is, I. Boaz's good management of his common affairs. It is probable, according to the common usage, 1. When his servants winnowed, he was with them, and had his eye upon them, to prevent, not their stealing any of his corn (he had no reason to fear that), but their waste of it through carelessness in the winnowing of it. Masters may sustain great losses by servants that are heedless, though they be honest, which is a reason why men should be diligent to know the state of their own flocks, and look well to them. 2. When he had more than ordinary work to be done, he treated his servants with extraordinary entertainments, and, for their encouragement, did eat and drink with them. It well becomes those that are rich and great to be generous to, and also to be familiar with, those that are under them, and employed for them. 3. When Boaz had supped with his workmen, and been awhile pleasant with them, he went to bed in due time, so early that by midnight he had his first sleep (r. 8), and thus he would be fit for his business betimes next morning. All that are good husbands will keep good hours, and not indulge themselves nor their families in unseasonable mirth. The Chaldee paraphrase tells us (r. 7) that Boaz ate and drank and his heart was good (and so the Hebrew word is), and he blessed the name of the Lord, who had heard his prayers, and taken away the famine from the land of Israel. So that he went sober to bed, his heart was in a good frame, and not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. And he did not go to bed without prayer. Now that he had eaten and was full he blessed the Lord, and now that he was going to rest he committed himself to the divine protection; it was well he did, for he had an unusual temptation before him, though he knew not of it. 4. He had his bed or couch laid at the end of the heap of corn; not because he had set his heart upon it, nor only that he might watch and keep it safe from thieves, but it was too late to go home to the city, and here he would be near his work, and ready for it next morning, and he would show that he was not nice or curious in his lodging, neither took state nor consulted his ease, but was, like his father Jacob, a plain man, that, when there was occasion, could make his bed in a barn, and, if need were, sleep contentedly in the straw.

II. Ruth's good assurance in the management of her affair. She observed her mother's orders, went and laid herself down, not by his side, but overcross his bed's feet, in her clothes, and kept awake, waiting for an opportunity to tell her errand. When he awaked in the night, and perceived there was somebody at his feet, and enquired who

it was, she told him her name and then her errand (v. 9), that she came to put herself under his protection, as the person appointed by the divine law to be her protector: "*Thou art he that has a right to redeem a family and an estate from perishing, and therefore let this ruin be under thy hand: and spread thy skirt over me*—be pleased to espouse me and my cause." Thus must we by faith apply ourselves to Jesus Christ as our next kinsman, that is able to redeem us, come under his wings, as we are invited (Matt. xxiii. 37), and beg of him to *spread his skirt over us*. "Lord Jesus, take me into thy covenant and under thy care. *I am oppressed, undertake for me.*"

III. The good acceptance Ruth gained with Boaz. What she did had no ill-effect, either one way or other, so that Naomi was not mistaken in her good opinion of her kinsman. He knew her demand was just and honourable, and treated her accordingly, and did not deal with his sister as with a harlot, Gen. xxiv. 31. For,

1. He did not offer to violate her chastity, though he had all the opportunity that could be. The Chaldee paraphrase thus descants upon it:—*He subdued his concupiscence, and did not approach to her, but did as Joseph the Just, who would not come near to his Egyptian mistress, and as Phaltiel the Pious, who, when Saul had given him Michal, David's wife (1 Sam. xxv. 44), put a sword between himself and her, that he might not touch her.* Boaz knew it was not any sinful lust that brought her thither, and therefore bravely maintained both his own honour and hers.

2. He did not put any ill construction upon what she did, did not reproach her as an impudent woman and unfit to make an honest man a wife. She having approved herself well in the fields, and all her conduct having been modest and decent, he would not, from this instance, entertain the least suspicion of her character nor seem to do so, perhaps blaming himself that he had not offered the service of a kinsman to these distressed widows, and saved her this trouble, and ready to say as Judah concerning his daughter-in-law, *She is more righteous than I*. But on the contrary,

(1.) He commended her, spoke kindly to her, called her his *daughter*, and spoke honourably of her, as a woman of eminent virtue. She had shown in this instance more kindness to her mother-in-law, and to the family into which she had matched, than in any instance yet. It was very kind to leave her own country and come along with her mother to the land of Israel, to dwell with her, and help to maintain her. For this he had blessed her (*ch. ii. 12*); but now he says, *Thou hast shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning (v. 10)*, in that she consulted not her own fancy, but her husband's family, in marrying again. She received not the addresses of *young men* (much less did she seek

them), *whether poor or rich*, but was willing to marry as the divine law directed, though it was to an old man, because it was for the honour and interest of the family into which she had matched, and for which she had an entire kindness. Young people must aim, in disposing of themselves, not so much to please their own eye as to please God and their parents.

(2.) He promised her marriage (v. 11): "*Fear not that I will slight thee, or expose thee; no, I will do all that thou requirest*, for it is the same that the law requires, from the next of kin, and I have no reason to decline it, *for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman,*" v. 11. Note, [1.] Exemplary virtue ought to have its due praise (Phil. iv. 8), and it will recommend both men and women to the esteem of the wisest and best. Ruth was a poor woman, and poverty often obscures the lustre of virtue: yet Ruth's virtues, even in a mean condition, were generally taken notice of and could not be hid; nay, her virtues took away the reproach of her poverty. If poor people be but good people, they shall have honour from God and man. Ruth had been remarkable for her humility, which paved the way to this honour. The less she proclaimed her own goodness the more did her neighbours take notice of it. [2.] In the choice of yoke-fellows, virtue should especially be regarded, known approved virtue. Let religion determine the choice, and it will certainly crown the choice and make it comfortable. *Wisdom is better than gold*, and, when it is said to be *good with an inheritance*, the meaning is that an inheritance is worth little without it.

(3.) He made his promise conditional, and could not do otherwise, for it seems there was a kinsman that was nearer than he, to whom the right of redemption did belong, v. 12. This he knew, but we may reasonably suppose Naomi (who had been long abroad, and could not be exact in the pedigree of her husband's family) was ignorant of it, otherwise she would never have sent her daughter to make her claim of Boaz. Yet he does not bid her go herself to this other kinsman; this would have been to put too great a hardship upon her: but he promises, [1.] That he would himself propose it to the other kinsman, and know his mind. The Hebrew word for a widow signifies *one that is dumb*. Boaz will therefore *open his mouth for the dumb* (Prov. xxxi. 8), and will say that for this widow which she knew not how to say for herself. [2.] That, if the other kinsman refused to do the kinsman's part, he would do it, would marry the widow, redeem the land, and so repair the family. This promise he backs with a solemn oath, for it was a conditional contract of marriage (v. 13): *As the Lord liveth*. Thus keeping the matter in suspense, he bade her wait till morning. Bishop Hall thus sums up this

matter in his contemplations:—"Boaz, instead of touching her as a wanton, blesseth her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts, no less chaste, more happy, than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of him in whose lips and heart there was no guile!"

14 And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor. 15 Also he said, Bring the veil that *thou hast* upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six *measures* of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who *art* thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her. 17 And she said, These six *measures* of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law. 18 Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

We are here told, I. How Ruth was dismissed by Boaz. It would not have been safe for her to go home in the dead of the night; therefore *she lay at his feet* (not by his side) *until morning*. But as soon as ever the day broke, that she had light to go home by, she got away, *before one could know another*, that, if she were seen, yet she might not be known to be abroad so unseasonably. She was not shy of being known to be a gleaner in the field, nor ashamed of that mark of her poverty. But she would not willingly be known to be a night-walker, for her virtue was her greatest honour, and that which she most valued. Boaz dismissed her, 1. With a charge to keep counsel (v. 14): *Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor*, and lay all night so near to Boaz; for, though they needed not to care much what people said of them while they were both conscious to themselves of an unspotted purity, yet, because few could have come so near the fire as they did and not have been scorched, had it been known it would have occasioned suspicions in some and reflections from others. Good people would have been troubled, and bad people would have triumphed, and therefore *let it not be known*. Note, We must always take care, not only to keep a good conscience, but to keep a good name: either we must not do that which, though innocent, is liable to be misinter-

preted, or, if we do, we must not *let it be known*. We must avoid not only sin, but scandal. There was likewise a particular reason for concealment here. If this matter should take wind, it might prejudice the freedom of the other kinsman's choice, and he would make this his reason for refusing Ruth, that Boaz and she had been together. 2. He dismissed her with a good present of corn, which would be very acceptable to her poor mother at home, and an evidence for her that he had not sent her away in dislike, which Naomi might have suspected if he had sent her away empty. He gave it to her in her *veil*, or *apron*, or *mantle*, gave it to her by measure. Like a prudent corn-master, he kept an account of all he delivered out. It was *six measures*, that is, six omers as is supposed, ten of which made an ephah; whatever the measure was, it is probable he gave her as much as she could well carry, v. 15. And the Chaldee says, *Strength was given her from the Lord to carry it*; and adds that now it was told her by the spirit of prophecy that from her should descend six of the most righteous men of their age, namely, David, Daniel, his three companions, and the king Messiah.

II. How she was welcomed by her mother-in-law. She asked her, "*Who art thou, my daughter? Art thou a bride or no? Must I give thee joy?*" So Ruth told her how the matter stood (v. 17), whereupon her mother, 1. Advised her to be satisfied in what was done: *Sit still, my daughter, till thou know how the matter will fall* (v. 18)—*how it is decreed in heaven*, so the Chaldee reads it, for marriages are made there. She had done all that was fit for her to do, and now she must patiently wait the issue and not be perplexed about it. Let us learn hence to cast our care upon providence, to follow that and attend the motions of it, composing ourselves into an expectation of the event, with a resolution to acquiesce in it, whatever it be. Sometimes that proves best done for us that is least our own doing. "*Sit still, therefore, and see how the matter will fall*, and say, Let it fall how it will, I am ready for it." 2. She assured her that Boaz, having undertaken this matter, would approve himself a faithful careful friend: *He will not be at rest till he have finished the matter*. Though it was a busy time with him in his fields and his floor, yet, having undertaken to serve his friend, he would not neglect the business. Naomi believes that Ruth has won his heart, and that therefore he will not be easy till he knows whether she be his or no. This she gives as a reason why Ruth should sit still and not perplex herself about it, that Boaz had undertaken it, and he would be sure to manage it well. Much more reason have good Christians to be careful for nothing, but cast their care on God, because he has promised to care for them: and what need have we to care if he



do? Sit still, and see how the matter will fall, for the Lord will perfect that which concerns thee, and will make it to work for good to thee, Ps. xxxvii. 4, 5; cxxxviii. 8. Your strength is to sit still, Isa. xxx. 7.

## CHAP. IV.

In this chapter we have the wedding between Boaz and Ruth, in the circumstances of which there was something uncommon, which is kept upon record for the illustration, but only of the law concerning the marrying of a brother's widow (Deut. xxv. 5, &c.), for cases help to expound laws, but of the gospel too, for from this marriage descended David, and the Son of David, whose espousals to the Gentile church were hereby typified. We are here told, I. How Boaz got clear of his rival, and fairly shook him off, ver. 1-8. II. How his marriage with Ruth was publicly solemnized, and attended with the good wishes of his neighbours, ver. 9-12. III. The happy issue that descended from this marriage, Obed, the grandfather of David, ver. 13-17. And so the book concludes with the pedigree of David, ver. 18-22. Perhaps it was to oblige him that the blessed Spirit directed the inserting of this story in the sacred canon, he being desirous that the virtues of his great-grandmother Ruth, together with her Gentile extraction and the singular providences that attended her, should be transmitted to posterity.

**T**HEN went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. 3 And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: 4 And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. 5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. 6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it. 7 Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. 8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

Here, 1. Boaz calls a court immediately. It is probable he was himself one of the elders (or aldermen) of the city; for he was a mighty man of wealth. Perhaps he was father of the city, and sat chief; for he seems here to have gone up to the gate as one having authority, and not as a common person; like Job, *ch.* xxix. 7, &c. We cannot suppose him less than a magistrate in his city who was grandson to Nahshon, prince of Judah; and his lying at the end of a heap of corn in the threshing-floor the night before was not at all inconsistent, in those days of plainness, with the honour of his sitting judge in the gate. But why was Boaz so hasty, why so fond of the match? Ruth was not rich, but lived upon alms; not honourable, but a poor stranger. She was never said to be beautiful; if ever she had been so, we may suppose that weeping, and travelling, and gleanings, had withered her lilies and roses. But that which made Boaz in love with her, and solicitous to expedite the affair, was that all her neighbours agreed she was a virtuous woman. This set her price with him *far above rubies* (Prov. xxxi. 10); and therefore he thinks, if by marrying her he might do her a real kindness, he should also do himself a very great kindness. He will therefore bring it to a conclusion immediately. It was not court-day, but he got ten men of the elders of the city to meet him in the town-hall over the gate, where public business used to be transacted, *v.* 2. So many, it is probable, by the custom of the city, made a full court. Boaz, though a judge, would not be judge in his own cause, but desired the concurrence of other elders. Honest intentions dread not a public cognizance. 2. He summons his rival to come and hear the matter that was to be proposed to him (*v.* 1): "*Ho, such a one, sit down here.*" He called him by his name, no doubt, but the divine historian thought not fit to record it, for, because he refused to raise up the name of the dead, he deserved not to have his name preserved to future ages in this history. Providence favoured Boaz in ordering it so that this kinsman should come by thus opportunely, just when the matter was ready to be proposed to him. Great affairs are sometimes much furthered by small circumstances, which facilitate and expedite them. 3. He proposes to the other kinsman the redemption of Naomi's land, which, it is probable, had been mortgaged for money to buy bread with when the famine was in the land (*v.* 3): "*Naomi has a parcel of land to sell, namely, the equity of the redemption of it out of the hands of the mortgagee, which she is willing to part with;*" or, as some think, it was her jointure for her life, and, wanting money, for a small matter she would sell her interest to the heir at law, who was fittest to be the purchaser. This he gives the kinsman legal notice of (*v.* 4), that he might have the refusal of it.

Whoever had it must pay for it, and Boaz might have said, "My money is as good as my kinsman's; if I have a mind to it, why may not I buy it privately, since I had the first proffer of it, and say nothing to my kinsman?" No, Boaz, though fond enough of the purchase, would not do so mean a thing as to take a bargain over another man's head that was nearer a-kin to it; and we are taught by his example to be not only just and honest, but fair and honourable, in all our dealings, and to do nothing which we are unwilling should see the light, but be above-board. 4. The kinsman seemed forward to redeem the land till he was told that, if he did that, he must marry the widow, and then he flew off. He liked the land well enough, and probably caught at that the more greedily because he hoped that the poor widow being under a necessity of selling he might have so much the better bargain: "*I will redeem it*" (said he) "with all my heart," thinking it would be a fine addition to his estate, r. 4. But Boaz told him there was a young widow in the case, and, if he have the land, he must take her with it, *Terra transit cum onere*—*The estate passes with this incumbrance*; either the divine law or the usage of the country would oblige him to it, or Naomi insisted upon it that she would not sell the land but upon this condition, r. 5. Some think this does not relate to the law of marrying the brother's widow (for that seems to oblige only the children of the same father, Deut. xxv. 5, unless by custom it was afterwards made to extend to the next of kin), but to the law of redemption of inheritances (Lev. xxv. 24, 25), for it is a *goel*, a *redeemer*, that is here enquired for; and if so it was not by the law, but by Naomi's own resolution, that the purchaser was to marry the widow. However it was, this kinsman, when he heard the conditions of the bargain, refused it (r. 6): "*I cannot redeem it for myself. I will not meddle with it upon these terms, lest I mar my own inheritance.*" The land, he thought, would be an improvement of his inheritance, but not the land with the woman; that would mar it. Perhaps he thought it would be a disparagement to him to marry such a poor widow that had come from a strange country, and almost lived upon alms. He fancied it would be a blemish to his family, it would mar his blood, and disgrace his posterity. Her eminent virtues were not sufficient in his eye to counterbalance this. The Chaldee paraphrase makes his reason for this refusal to be that he had another wife, and, if he should take Ruth, it might occasion strife and contention in his family, which would mar the comfort of his inheritance. Or he thought she might bring him a great many children, and they would all expect shares out of his estate, which would scatter it into too many hands, so that the family would make the less figure. This makes many shy

of the great redemption: they are not willing to espouse religion. They have heard well of it, and have nothing to say against it; they will give it their good word, but at the same time they will give their good word with it; they are willing to part with it, and cannot be bound to it, for fear of marring their own inheritance in this world. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness they can dispense with; it will not agree with the lusts they have already espoused, and therefore, let who will purchase heaven at that rate, they cannot. 5. The right of redemption is fairly resigned to Boaz. If this nameless kinsman lost a good bargain, a good estate, and a good wife too, he may thank himself for not considering it better, and Boaz will thank him for making his way clear to that which he valued and desired above any thing. In those ancient times it was not the usage to pass estates by writings, as afterwards (Jer. xxxii. 10, &c.), but by some sign or ceremony, as with us by livery and seisin, as we commonly call it, that is, the delivery of seisin, seisin of a house by giving the key, of land by giving turf and a twig. The ceremony here used was, he that surrendered *plucked off his shoe* (the Chaldee says it was *the glove of his right hand*, and gave it to him to whom he made the surrender, intimating thereby that, whatever right he had to tread or go upon the land, he conveyed and transferred it, upon a valuable consideration, to the purchaser: this was a *testimony in Israel*, r. 7. And it was done in this case, r. 8. If this kinsman had been bound by the law to marry Ruth, and his refusal had been a contempt of that law, Ruth must have *plucked off his shoe and spit in his face*, Deut. xxv. 9. But, though his relation should in some measure oblige him to the duty, yet the distance of his relation might serve to excuse him from the penalty, or Ruth might very well dispense with it, since his refusal was all she desired from him. But bishop Patrick, and the best interpreters, think this had no relation to that law, and that the drawing off of the shoe was not any disgrace as there, but a confirmation of the surrender, and an evidence that it was not fraudulently nor surreptitiously obtained. Note, Fair and open dealing in all matters of contract and commerce is what all those must make conscience of that would approve themselves Israelites indeed, without guile. How much more honourably and honestly does Boaz come by this purchase than if he had secretly undermined his kinsman, and privately struck up a bargain with Naomi, unknown to him. Honesty will be found the best policy.

¶ And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand

of Naomi. 10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye *are* witnesses this day. 11 And all the people that *were* in the gate, and the elders, said, *We are* witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephrath, and be famous in Beth-lehem: 12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

Boaz now sees his way clear, and therefore delays not to perform his promise made to Ruth that he would do the kinsman's part, but in the gate of his city, before the elders and all the people, publishes a marriage-contract between himself and Ruth the Moabitess, and therewith the purchase of all the estate that belonged to the family of Elimelech. If he had not been (*ch. ii. 1*) a *mighty man of wealth*, he could not have compassed this redemption, nor done this service to his kinsman's family. What is a great estate good for, but that it enables a man to do so much the more good in his generation, and especially to those of his own household, if he have but a heart to use it so! Now concerning this marriage it appears,

I. That it was solemnized, or at least published, before many witnesses, *v. 9, 10*. "You are witnesses." 1. "That I have bought the estate. Whoever has it, or any part of it, mortgaged to him, let him come to me and he shall have his money, according to the value of the land," which was computed by the number of years to the year of jubilee (*Lev. xxv. 15*), when it would have returned of course to Elimelech's family. The more public the sales of estates are the better they are guarded against frauds. 2. "That I have purchased the widow to be my wife." He had no portion with her; what jointure she had was encumbered, and he could not have it without giving as much for it as it was worth, and therefore he might well say he purchased her; and yet, being a virtuous woman, he reckoned he had a good bargain. *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers*, but a prudent wife is more valuable, is from the Lord as a special gift. He designed, in marrying her, to preserve the memory of the dead, that the name of Mahlon, though he left no son to bear it up, might not be cut off from the gate of his

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place, but by this means might be preserved, that it should be inserted in the public register that Boaz married Ruth the widow of Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, which posterity, whenever they had occasion to consult the register, would take particular notice of. And this history, being preserved for the sake of that marriage and the issue of it, proved an effectual means to perpetuate the name of Mahlon, even beyond the thought or intention of Boaz, to the world's end. And observe that because Boaz did this honour to the dead, as well as this kindness to the living, God did him the honour to bring him into the genealogy of the Messiah, by which his family was dignified above all the families of Israel; while the other kinsman, that was so much afraid of diminishing himself, and marrying his inheritance, by marrying the widow, has his name, family, and inheritance, buried in oblivion and disgrace. A tender and generous concern for the honour of the dead and the comfort of poor widows and strangers, neither of which can return the kindness (*Luke xiv. 14*), is what God will be well pleased with and will surely recompense. Our Lord Jesus is our *Goel*, our Redeemer, our everlasting Redeemer. He looked, like Boaz, with compassion on the deplorable state of fallen mankind. At a vast expense he redeemed the heavenly inheritance for us, which by sin was mortgaged, and forfeited into the hands of divine justice, and which we should never have been able to redeem. He likewise purchased a peculiar people, whom he would espouse to himself, though strangers and foreigners, like Ruth, poor and despised, that the name of that dead and buried race might not be cut off for ever. He ventured the marring of his own inheritance, to do this, for, *though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor*; but he was abundantly recompensed for it by his Father, who, because he thus humbled himself, hath *highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name*. Let us own our obligations to him, make sure our contract with him, and study all our days how to do him honour. Boaz, by making a public declaration of this marriage and purchase, not only secured his title against all pretenders, as it were by a fine with proclamations, but put honour upon Ruth, showed that he was not ashamed of her, and her parentage and poverty, and left a testimony against clandestine marriages. It is only that which is evil that hates the light and comes not to it. Boaz called witnesses to what he did, for it was what he could justify, and would never disown; and such regard was ther had, even to the contemned crowd, that not only the elders, but all the people that were in the gate, passing and re-passing, were appealed to (*v. 9*), and hearkened to (*v. 11*) when they said, *We are witnesses*.

II. That it was attended with many prayers. The elders and all the people, when they witnessed to it, wished well to it, and blessed it,

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v. 11, 12. Ruth, it should seem, was now sent for; for they speak of her (v. 12) as present: *This young woman*; and, he having taken her to wife, they look upon her as already come into his house. And very heartily they pray for the new-married couple.

1. The senior elder, it is likely, made this prayer, and the rest of the elders, with the people, joined in it, and therefore it is spoken of as made by them all; for in public prayers, though but one speaks, we must all pray. Observe, (1.) Marriages ought to be blessed, and accompanied with prayer, because every creature and every condition are that to us, and no more, that God makes them to be. It is civil and friendly to wish all happiness to those who enter into that condition; and what good we desire we should pray for from the fountain of all good. The minister who gives himself to the word and prayer, as he is the fittest person to exhort, so he is the fittest to bless and pray for those that enter into this relation. (2.) We ought to desire and pray for the welfare and prosperity one of another, so far from envying or grieving at it.

2. Now here, (1.) They prayed for Ruth: *The Lord make the woman that has come into thy house like Rachel and Leah*, that is, "God make her a good wife and a fruitful mother." Ruth was a virtuous woman, and yet needed the prayers of her friends, that by the grace of God she might be made a blessing to the family she had come into. They prayed that she might be like Rachel and Leah, rather than like Sarah and Rebekah, for Sarah had but one son, and Rebekah but one that was in covenant, the other was Esau, who was rejected; but Rachel and Leah did *build up the house of Israel*: all their children were in the church, and their offspring was numerous. "May she be a flourishing, fruitful, faithful *vine by thy house side*." (2.) They prayed for Boaz, that he might continue to do worthily in the city to which he was an ornament, and might there be more and more famous. They desired that the wife might be a blessing in the private affairs of the house, and the husband a blessing in the public business of the town, that she in her place, and he in his, might be wise, virtuous, and successful. Observe, The way to be famous is to do worthily. Great reputation must be obtained by great merits. It is not enough not to do unworthily, to be harmless and inoffensive, but we must do worthily, be useful and serviceable to our generation. Those that would be truly illustrious must in their places shine as lights. (3.) They prayed for the family: "*Let thy house be like the house of Pharez*," that is, "let it be very numerous, let it greatly increase and multiply, as the house of Pharez did." The Bethlehemites were of the house of Pharez, and knew very well how numerous it was; in the distribution of the tribes, that grandson of Jacob had the honour which none of

the rest had but Manasseh and Ephraim, that his posterity was subdivided into two distinct families, Hezron and Hamul, Num. xxvi. 21. Now they prayed that the family of Boaz, which was one branch of that stock, might in process of time become as numerous and great as the whole stock now was.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. 14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed *be the LORD*, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. 15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of *thy* life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. 16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. 17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. 18 Now these *are* the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron, 19 And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, 20 And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, 21 And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, 22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

Here is, I. Ruth a wife Boaz took her, with the usual solemnities, to his house, and *she became his wife* (v. 13), all the city, no doubt, congratulating the preferment of a virtuous woman, purely for her virtues. We have reason to think that Orpah, who returned from Naomi to her people and her gods, was never half so well preferred as Ruth was. He that forsakes all for Christ shall find more than all with him; it shall be recompensed a hundred-fold in this present time. Now Orpah wished she had gone with Naomi too; but she, like the other kinsman, stood in her own light. Boaz had prayed that this pious proselyte might receive a full reward of her courage and constancy from the God of Israel, *under whose wings she had come to trust*; and now he became an instrument of that kindness, which was an answer to his prayer, and helped to make his own words good. Now she had the command of those servants with whom she had associated and of those fields in which she had gleaned. Thus sometimes *God raiseth up the poor out*

of the dust, to set them with princes, Ps. cxlii. 7, 8.

H. Ruth a mother: *The Lord gave her conception; for the fruit of the womb is his reward*, Ps. cxvii. 3. It is one of the keys he hath in his hand; and he sometimes makes the barren woman that had been long so to be a *joyful mother of children*, Ps. cxlii. 9; Isa. liv. 1.

III. Ruth still a daughter-in-law, and the same that she always was, to Naomi, who was so far from being forgotten that she was a principal sharer in these new joys. The good-women that were at the labour when this child was born congratulated Naomi upon it more than either Boaz or Ruth, because she was the match-maker, and it was the family of her husband that was hereby built up. See here, as before, what an air of devotion there was then even in the common expressions of civility among the Israelites. Prayer to God attended the marriage (v. 11), and praise to him attended the birth of the child. What a pity it is that such pious language should either be disused among Christians or degenerate into a formality. "*Blessed be the Lord that has sent thee this grandson*," v. 14, 15. 1. Who was the preserver of the name of her family, and who, they hoped, would be famous, because his father was so. 2. Who would be hereafter dutiful and kind to her, so they hoped, because his mother was so. If he would but take after her, he would be a comfort to his aged grandmother, a restorer of her life, and, if there should be occasion, would have wherewithal to be the nourisher of her old age. It is a great comfort to those that are going into years to see any of those that

descend from them growing up, that are likely, by the blessing of God, to be a stay and support to them, when the years come wherein they will need such, and of which they will say they have no pleasure in them. Observe, They say of Ruth that she loved Naomi, and therefore was better to her than seven sons. See how God in his providence sometimes makes up the want and loss of those relations from whom we expected most comfort in those from whom we expected least. The bonds of love prove stronger than those of nature, and there is a *friend that sticks closer than a brother*; so here there was a daughter-in-law better than an own child. See what wisdom and grace will do. Now here, (1.) The child is named by the neighbours, v. 17. The good women would have it called *Obed, a servant*, either in remembrance of the meanness and poverty of the mother or in prospect of his being hereafter a servant, and very serviceable, to his grandmother. It is no dishonour to those that are ever so well born to be servants to God, their friends, and their generation. The motto of the princes of Wales is *Ich dien—I serve*. (2.) The child is nursed by the grandmother, that is, dry-nursed, when the mother had weaned him from the breast, v. 16. She laid it in her bosom, in token of her tender affection to it and care of it. Grandmothers are often the most fond.

IV. Ruth is hereby brought in among the ancestors of David and Christ, which was the greatest honour. The genealogy is here drawn from Pharez, through Boaz and Obed, to David, and so leads towards the Messiah, and therefore it is not an endless genealogy.

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AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE FIRST BOOK OF

## SAMUEL.

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THIS book, and that which follows it, bear the name of *Samuel* in the title, not because he was the penman of them (except of so much of them as fell within his own time, to the twenty-fifth chapter of the first book, in which we have an account of his death), but because the first book begins with a large account of him, his birth and childhood, his life and government; and the rest of these two volumes that are denominated from him contains the history of the reigns of *Saul and David*, who were both anointed by him. And, because the history of these two kings takes up the greatest part of these books, the Vulgar Latin calls them the *First and Second Books of the Kings*, and the two that follow the *Third and Fourth*, which the titles in

our English Bibles take notice of with an *alias*: otherwise called the *First Book of the Kings*, &c. The *I.XX.* call them the first and second *Book of the Kingdoms*. It is needless to contend about it, but there is no occasion to vary from the Hebrew verity. These two books contain the history of the last two of the judges, *Eli* and *Samuel*, who were not, as the rest, men of war, but priests (and so much of them is an appendix to the book of Judges), and of the first two of the kings, *Saul* and *David*, and so much of them is an entrance upon the history of the kings. They contain a considerable part of the sacred history, are sometimes referred to in the New Testament, and often in the titles of David's Psalms, which, if placed in their order, would fall in in these books. It is uncertain who was the penman of them; it is probable that Samuel wrote the history of his own time, and that, after him, some of the prophets that were with David (Natban as likely as any) continued it. This first book gives us a full account of Eli's fall and Samuel's rise and good government, *ch. i.—viii.* Of Samuel's resignation of the government and Saul's advancement and mal-administration, *ch. ix.—xv.* The choice of David, his struggles with Saul, Saul's ruin at last, and the opening of the way for David to the throne, *ch. xvi.—xxx.* And these things are written for our learning.

### CHAP. I.

The history of Samuel here begins as early as that of Samson did, even before he was born, as afterwards the history of John the Baptist and our blessed Saviour. Some of the scripture-worthies drop out of the clouds, as it were, and their first appearance is in their full growth and lustre. But others are accounted for from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. What God says of the prophet Jeremiah is true of all: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee," Jer. i. 5. But some great men were brought into the world with more observation than others, and were more early distinguished from common persons, as Samuel for one. God, in this matter, acts as a free agent. The story of Samson introduces him as a child of promise, Judg. xiii. But the story of Samuel introduces him as a child of prayer. Samson's birth was foretold by an angel to his mother; Samuel was asked of God by his mother. Both together intimate what wonders are produced by the word and prayer. Samuel's mother was Hannah, the principal person concerned in the story of this chapter. I. Here is her affliction—she was childless, and this affliction aggravated by her rival's insolence, but in some measure balanced by her husband's kindness, ver. 1—8. II. The prayer and vow she made to God under this affliction, in which Eli the high priest at first censured her, but afterwards encouraged her, ver. 9—18. III. The birth and nursing of Samuel, ver. 19—23. IV. The presenting of him to the Lord, ver. 24—28.

**N**OW there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: 2 And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there. 4 And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: 5 But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb. 6 And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. 7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the

Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. 8 Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

We have here an account of the state of the family into which Samuel the prophet was born. His father's name was Elkanah, a Levite, and of the family of the Kohathites (the most honourable house of that tribe) as appears, 1 Chron. vi. 33, 34. His ancestor Zuph was an Ephrathite, that is, of Bethlehem-Judah, which was called *Ephrathah*, Ruth i. 2. There this family of the Levites was first seated, but one branch of it, in process of time, removed to Mount Ephraim, from which Elkanah descended. Micah's Levite came from Bethlehem to Mount Ephraim, Judg. xvii. 8. Ministers' families are as movable as any. Perhaps notice is taken of their being originally Ephrathites to show their alliance to David. This Elkanah lived at Ramah, or Ramathaim, which signifies the *double Ramah*, the higher and lower town, the same with Arimathea of which Joseph was, here called *Ramathaim-zophim*. Zophim signifies *watchmen*; probably they had one of the schools of the prophets there, for prophets are called *watchmen*: the Chaldee paraphrase calls Elkanah a *disciple of the prophets*. But it seems to me that it was in Samuel that prophecy revived, before his time there being, for a great while, no open vision, *ch. iii. 1.* Nor is there any mention of a prophet of the Lord from Moses to Samuel, except Judg. vi. 8. So that we have no reason to think that there was any nursery or college of prophets here till Samuel himself founded one, *ch. xix. 19, 20.* This is the account of Samuel's parentage, and the place of his nativity. Let us now take notice of the state of the family.

I. It was a devout family. All the families of Israel should be so, but Levites' families in a particular manner. Ministers should be patterns of family religion. Elkanah went

up at the solemn feasts to the tabernacle at Shiloh, to *worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts*. I think this is the first time in scripture that God is called *the Lord of hosts—Jehovah Sabaoth*, a name by which he was afterwards very much called and known. Probably Samuel the prophet was the first that used this title of God, for the comfort of Israel, when in his time their hosts were few and feeble and those of their enemies many and mighty; then it would be a support to them to think that the God they served was Lord of hosts, of all the hosts both of heaven and earth; of them he has a sovereign command, and makes what use he pleases of them. Elkanah was a country Levite, and, for aught that appears, had not any place or office which required his attendance at the tabernacle, but he went up as a common Israelite, with his own sacrifices, to encourage his neighbours and set them a good example. When he sacrificed he worshipped, joining prayers and thanksgivings with his sacrifices. In this course of religion he was constant, for he went up yearly. And that which made it the more commendable in him was, 1. That there was a general decay and neglect of religion in the nation. Some among them worshipped other gods, and the generality were remiss in the service of the God of Israel, and yet Elkanah kept his integrity; whatever others did, his resolution was that he and his house should serve the Lord. 2. That Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were the men that were now chiefly employed in the service of the house of God; and they were men that conducted themselves very ill in their place, as we shall find afterwards; yet Elkanah went up to sacrifice. God had then tied his people to one place and one altar, and forbidden them, under any pretence whatsoever, to worship elsewhere, and therefore, in pure obedience to that command, he attended at Shiloh. If the priests did not do their duty, he would do his. Thanks be to God, we, under the gospel, are not tied to any one place or family; but the pastors and teachers whom the exalted Redeemer has given to his church are those only whose ministration tends to the *perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ*, Eph. iv. 11, 12. None have dominion over our faith; but our obligation is to those that are the helpers of our holiness and joy, not to any that by their scandalous immoralities, like Hophni and Phinehas, make the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred, though still the validity and efficacy of the sacraments depend not on the purity of him that administers them.

II. Yet it was a divided family, and the divisions of it carried with them both guilt and grief. Where there is piety, it is a pity but there should be unity. The joint-devotions of a family should put an end to divisions in it.

1. The original cause of this division was

Elkanah's marrying two wives, which was a transgression of the original institution of marriage, to which our Saviour reduces it. Matt. xix. 5, 8, *From the beginning it was not so*. It made mischief in Abraham's family, and Jacob's, and here in Elkanah's. How much better does the law of God provide for our comfort and ease in this world than we should, if we were left to ourselves! It is probable that Elkanah married Hannah first, and, because he had not children by her so soon as he hoped, he married Peninnah, who bore him children indeed, but was in other things a vexation to him. Thus are men often beaten with rods of their own making.

2. That which followed upon this error was that the two wives could not agree. They had different blessings: Peninnah, like Leah, was fruitful and had many children, which should have made her easy and thankful, though she was but a second wife, and was less beloved; Hannah, like Rachel, was childless indeed, but she was very dear to her husband, and he took all occasions to let both her and others know that she was so, and many a *worthy portion he gave her* (v. 5), and this should have made her easy and thankful. But they were of different tempers: Peninnah could not bear the blessing of fruitfulness, but she grew haughty and insolent; Hannah could not bear the affliction of barrenness, but she grew melancholy and discontented: and Elkanah had a difficult part to act between them.

(1.) Elkanah kept up his attendance at God's altar notwithstanding this unhappy difference in his family, and took his wives and children with him, that, if they could not agree in other things, they might agree to worship God together. If the devotions of a family prevail not to put an end to its divisions, yet let not the divisions put a stop to the devotions.

(2.) He did all he could to encourage Hannah, and to keep up her spirits under her affliction, v. 4, 5. At the feast he offered peace-offerings, to supplicate for peace in his family; and when he and his family were to eat their share of the sacrifice, in token of their communion with God and his altar, though he carved to Peninnah and her children competent portions, yet to Hannah he gave a worthy portion, the choicest piece that came to the table, the piece (whatever it was) that used to be given on such occasions to those that were most valued; this he did in token of his love to her, and to give all possible assurances of it. Observe, [1.] Elkanah loved his wife never the less for her being barren. *Christ loves his church*, notwithstanding her infirmities, her barrenness; and *so ought men to love their wives*, Eph. v. 25. To abate our just love to any relation for the sake of any infirmity which they cannot help, and which is not their sin but their affliction, is to make God's providence quarrel with his precept, and very unkindly to

add affliction to the afflicted. [2.] He studied to show his love so much the more because she was afflicted, insulted, and low-spirited. It is wisdom and duty to support the weakest, and to hold up those that are run down. [3.] He showed his great love to her by the share he gave her of his peace-offerings. Thus we should testify our affection to our friends and relations, by abounding in prayer for them. The better we love them the more room let us give them in our prayers.

(3.) Peninnah was extremely peevish and provoking. [1.] She upbraided Hannah with her affliction, despised her because she was barren, and gave her taunting language, as one whom Heaven did not favour. [2.] She envied the interest she had in the love of Elkanah, and the more kind he was to her the more was she exasperated against her, which was all over base and barbarous. [3.] She did this most when they went up to the house of the Lord, perhaps because then they were more together than at other times, or because then Elkanah showed his affection most to Hannah. But it was very sinful at such a time to show her malice, when pure hands were to be lifted up at God's altar without wrath and quarrelling. It was likewise very unkind at that time to vex Hannah, not only because then they were in company, and others would take notice of it, but then Hannah was to mind her devotions, and desired to be most calm and composed, and free from disturbance. The great adversary to our purity and peace is then most industrious to ruffle us when we should be most composed. When the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord Satan will be sure to come among them, Job i. 6. [4.] She continued to do this from year to year, not once or twice, but it was her constant practice; neither deference to her husband nor compassion to Hannah could break her of it. [5.] That which she designed was to make her fret, perhaps in hopes to break her heart, that she might possess her husband's heart solely, or because she took a pleasure in her uneasiness, nor could Hannah gratify her more than by fretting. Note, It is an evidence of a base disposition to delight in grieving those that are melancholy and of a sorrowful spirit, and in putting those out of humour that are apt to fret and be uneasy. We ought to bear one another's burdens, not add to them.

(4.) Hannah (poor woman) could not bear the provocation: *She wept, and did not eat*, v. 7. It made her uneasy to herself and to all her relations. She did not eat of the feast; her trouble took away her appetite, made her unfit for any company, and a jar in the harmony of family-joy. It was of the feast upon the sacrifice that she did not eat, for they were not to eat of the holy things in their mourning, Deut. xxvi. 14; Lev. x. 19. Yet it was her infirmity so far to give way to the sorrow of the world as to unfit herself

for holy joy in God. Those that are of a fretful spirit, and are apt to lay provocations too much to heart, are enemies to themselves, and strip themselves very much of the comforts both of life and godliness. We find that God took notice of this ill effect of discontent and disagreements in the conjugal relation, that the parties aggrieved covered the altar of the Lord with tears, inasmuch that he regarded not the offering, Mal. ii. 13.

(5.) Elkanah said what he could to her to comfort her. She did not upbraid him with his unkindness in marrying another wife as Sarah did, nor did she render to Peninnah railing for railing, but took the trouble wholly to herself, which made her an object of much compassion. Elkanah showed himself extremely grieved at her grief (v. 8): *Hannah, why weepest thou?* [1.] He is much disquieted to see her thus overwhelmed with sorrow. Those that by marriage are made one flesh ought thus far to be of one spirit too, to share in each other's troubles, so that one cannot be easy while the other is uneasy. [2.] He gives her a loving reproof for it: *Why weepest thou? And why is thy heart grieved?* As many as God loves he rebukes, and so should we. He puts her upon enquiring into the cause of her grief. Though she had just reason to be troubled, yet let her consider whether she had reason to be troubled to such a degree, especially so much as to be taken off by it from eating of the holy things. Note, Our sorrow upon any account is sinful and inordinate when it diverts us from our duty to God and embitters our comfort in him, when it makes us unthankful for the mercies we enjoy and distrustful of the goodness of God to us in further mercies, when it casts a damp upon our joy in Christ, and hinders us from doing the duty and taking the comfort of our particular relations. [3.] He intimates that nothing should be wanting on his part to balance her grief: *"Am not I better to thee than ten sons?"* Thou knowest thou hast my entire affection, and let that comfort thee." Note, We ought to take notice of our comforts, to keep us from grieving excessively for our crosses; for our crosses we deserve, but our comforts we have forfeited. If we would keep the balance even, we must look at that which is for us, as well as at that which is against us, else we are unjust to Providence and unkind to ourselves. *God hath set the one over-against the other* (Ecc. vii. 14) and so should we.

9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. 10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. 11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord



of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. 15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I *am* a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. 17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant *thee* thy petition that thou hast asked of him. 18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more *sad*.

Elkanah had gently reprov'd Hannah for her inordinate grief, and here we find the good effect of the reproof.

I. It brought her to her meat. She ate and drank, *v. 9*. She did not harden herself in sorrow, nor grow sullen when she was reprov'd for it; but, when she perceived her husband uneasy that she did not come and eat with them, she cheered up her own spirits as well as she could, and came to table. It is as great a piece of self-denial to control our passions as it is to control our appetites.

II. It brought her to her prayers. It put her upon considering, "Do I well to be angry? Do I well to fret? What good does it do me? Instead of binding the burden thus upon my own shoulders, had I not better ease myself of it, and cast it upon the Lord by prayer?" Elkanah had said, *Am not I better to thee than ten sons?* which perhaps occasioned her to think within herself, "Whether *he* be so or no, *God* is, and therefore to him will I apply, and before him will I pour out my complaint, and try what relief that will give me." If ever she will make a more solemn address than ordinary to the

throne of grace upon this errand, now is the time. They are at Shiloh, at the door of the tabernacle, where God had promised to meet his people, and which was the *house of prayer*. They had recently offered their peace-offerings, to obtain the favour of God and all good and in token of their communion with him; and, taking the comfort of their being accepted of him, they had feasted upon the sacrifice; and now it was proper to put up her prayer in virtue of that sacrifice, for the peace-offerings typified Christ's mediation as well as the sin-offerings, for by it not only atonement is made for sin, but the audience and acceptance of our prayers and an answer of peace to them are obtained for us: to that sacrifice, in all our supplications, we must have an eye. Now concerning Hannah's prayer we may observe,

1. The warm and lively devotion there was in it, which appeared in several instances, for our direction in prayer. (1.) She improved the present grief and trouble of her spirit for the exciting and quickening of her pious affections in prayer: *Being in bitterness of soul, she prayed, v. 10*. This good use we should make of our afflictions, they should make us the more lively in our addresses to God. Our blessed Saviour himself, *being in an agony, prayed more earnestly, Luke xxii. 44*. (2.) She mingled tears with her prayers. It was not a dry prayer: she wept sore. Like a true Israelite, she *wept and made supplication (Hos. xii. 4)*, with an eye to the tender mercy of our God, who knows the troubled soul. The prayer came from her heart, as the tears from her eyes. (3.) She was very particular, and yet very modest, in her petition. She begged a child, a man-child, that it might be fit to serve in the tabernacle. God gives us leave, in prayer, not only to ask good things in general, but to mention that special good thing which we most need and desire. Yet she says not as Rachel, *Give me children, Gen. xxx. 1*. She will be very thankful for *one*. (4.) She made a solemn vow, or promise, that if God would give her a son she would *give him up to God, v. 11*. He would be by birth a Levite, and so devoted to the service of God, but he should be by her vow a Nazarite, and his very childhood should be sacred. It is probable she had acquainted Elkanah with her purpose before, and had had his consent and approbation. Note, Parents have a right to dedicate their children to God, as living sacrifices and spiritual priests; and an obligation is thereby laid upon them to serve God faithfully *all the days of their life*. Note further, It is very proper, when we are in pursuit of any mercy, to bind our own souls with a bond, that, if God give it us, we will devote it to his honour and cheerfully use it in his service. Not that hereby we can pretend to merit the gift, but thus we are qualified for it and for the comfort of it. In hope of mercy, let us promise duty. (5.)

She spoke all this so softly that none could hear her. Her lips moved, but *her voice was not heard*, v. 13. Hereby she testified her belief of God's knowledge of the heart and its desires. Thoughts are words to him, nor is he one of those gods that must be *cried aloud to*, 1 Kings xviii. 27. It was likewise an instance of her humility and holy shamefacedness in her approach to God. She was none of those that *made her voice to be heard on high*, Isa. lviii. 4. It was a secret prayer, and therefore, though made in a public place, yet was thus made secretly, and not, as the Pharisees prayed, *to be seen of men*. It is true prayer is not a thing we have reason to be ashamed of, but we must avoid all appearances of ostentation. Let what passes between God and our souls be kept to ourselves.

2. The hard censure she fell under for it. Eli was now high priest, and judge in Israel; he sat upon a seat in the temple, to oversee what was done there, v. 9. The tabernacle is here called the *temple*, because it was now fixed, and served all the purposes of a temple. There Eli sat to receive addresses and give direction, and somewhere (it is probable in a private corner) he espied Hannah at her prayers, and by her unusual manner fancied she was drunken, and spoke to her accordingly (v. 14): *How long will thou be drunken?*—the very imputation that Peter and the apostles fell under when the Holy Ghost *gave them utterance*, Acts ii. 13. Perhaps in this degenerate age it was no strange thing to see drunken women at the door of the tabernacle; for otherwise, one would think, the vile lust of Hophni and Phinehas could not have found so easy a prey there, ch. ii. 22. Eli took Hannah for one of these. It is one bad effect of the abounding of iniquity, and its becoming fashionable, that it often gives occasion to suspect the innocent. When a disease is epidemical every one is suspected to be tainted with it. Now, (1.) This was Eli's fault; and a great fault it was to pass so severe a censure without better observation or information. If his own eyes had already become dim, he should have employed those about him to enquire. Drunkards are commonly noisy and turbulent, but this poor woman was silent and composed. His fault was the worse that he was the priest of the Lord, who should have had *compassion on the ignorant*, Heb. v. 2. Note, It ill becomes us to be rash and hasty in our censures of others, and to be forward to believe people guilty of bad things, while either the matter of fact on which the censure is grounded is doubtful and unproved or is capable of a good construction. Charity commands us to hope the best concerning all, and forbids censoriousness. Paul had very good information when he did but *partly believe* (1 Cor. xi. 18), hoping it was not so. Especially we ought to be cautious how we ensure the devotions of others, lest we call that *hypo-*

*crisy, enthusiasm, or superstition*, which is really the fruit of an honest zeal, and it is accepted of God. (2.) It was Hannah's affliction; and a great affliction it was, added to all the rest, vinegar to the wounds of her spirit. She had been reproved by Elkanah because she would not eat and drink, and now to be reproached by Eli as if she had eaten and drunk too much was very hard. Note, It is no new thing for those that do well to be ill thought of, and we must not think it strange if at any time it be our lot.

3. Hannah's humble vindication of herself from this crime with which she was charged. She bore it admirably well. She did not retort the charge and upbraid him with the debauchery of his own sons, did not bid him look at home and restrain them, did not tell him how ill it became one in his place thus to abuse a poor sorrowful worshipper at the throne of grace. When we are at any time unjustly censured we have need to set a double watch before the door of our lips, that we do not recriminate, and return censure for censure. Hannah thought it enough to vindicate herself, and so must we, v. 15, 16. (1.) In justice to herself, she expressly denies the charge, speaks to him with all possible respect, calls him, *My lord*, intimates how very desirous she was to stand right in his opinion and how loth to lie under his censure. "No, my lord, it is not as you suspect; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, not any at all" (though it was proper enough to be given to one of such a *heavy heart*, Prov. xxxi. 6), "much less to any excess; therefore *count not thy handmaid for a daughter of Belial*." Note, Drunkards are children of Belial (women-drunkards particularly), children of the wicked one, children of disobedience, children that will not endure the yoke (else they would not be drunk), more especially when they are actually drunk. Those that cannot govern themselves will not bear that any one else should. Hannah owns that the crime would have been very great if she had indeed been guilty of it, and he might justly have shut her out of the courts of God's house; but the very manner of her speaking in her own defence was sufficient to demonstrate that she was not drunk. (2.) In justice to him, she gives an account of her present behaviour, which had given occasion to his suspicion: "*I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit*, dejected and discomposed. and that is the reason I do not look as other people; the eyes are red, not with wine, but with weeping. And at this time I have not been talking to myself, as drunkards and fools do, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord, who hears and understands the language of the heart, and this out of the abundance of my complaint and grief." She had been more than ordinarily fervent in prayer to God, and this, she tells him, was the true reason of the transport and

disorder she seemed to be in. Note, When we are unjustly censured we should endeavour, not only to clear ourselves, but to satisfy our brethren, by giving them a just and true account of that which they misapprehended.

4. The atonement Eli made for his rash unfriendly censure, by a kind and fatherly benediction, *v. 17.* He did not (as many are apt to do in such a case) take it for an affront to have his mistake rectified and to be convinced of his error, nor did it put him out of humour. But, on the contrary, he now encouraged Hannah's devotions as much as before he had discountenanced them; not only intimated that he was satisfied of her innocency by those words, *Go in peace*, but, being high priest, as one having authority he blessed her in the name of the Lord, and, though he knew not what the particular blessing was that she had been praying for, yet he puts his *Amen* to it, so good an opinion had he now conceived of her prudence and piety: *The God of Israel grant thee thy petition*, whatever it is, *that thou hast asked of him.* Note, By our meek and humble carriage towards those that reproach us because they do not know us, we may perhaps make them our friends, and turn their censures of us into prayers for us.

5. The great satisfaction of mind with which Hannah now went away, *v. 18.* She begged the continuance of Eli's good opinion of her and his good prayers for her, and then she went her way and did eat of what remained of the peace-offerings (none of which was to be left until the morning), *and her countenance was no more sad*, no more as it had been, giving marks of inward trouble and discomposure; but she looked pleasant and cheerful, and all was well. Why, what had happened? Whence came this sudden happy change? She had by prayer committed her case to God and left it with him, and now she was no more perplexed about it. She had prayed for herself, and Eli had prayed for her; and she believed that God would either give her the mercy she had prayed for or make up the want of it to her some other way. Note, Prayer is heart's-ease to a gracious soul; the seed of Jacob have often found it so, being confident that God will never say unto them, *Seek you me in vain*, see Phil. iv. 6, 7. Prayer will smooth the countenance; it should do so.

19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. 20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and

called his name Samuel, *saying*, Because I have asked him of the LORD. 21 And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. 22 But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, *I will not go up* until the child be weaned, and *then* I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever. 23 And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. 24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child *was* young. 25 And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, Oh my lord, *as* thy soul liveth, my lord, *I am* the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: 28 Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

Here is, I. The return of Elkanah and his family to their own habitation, when the days appointed for the feast were over, *v. 19.* Observe how they improved their time at the tabernacle. Every day they were there, even that which was fixed for their journey home, they worshipped God; and they rose up early to do it. It is good to begin the day with God. Let him that is the first have the first. They had a journey before them, and a family of children to take with them, and yet they would not stir till they had worshipped God together. Prayer and provender do not hinder a journey. They had spent several days now in religious worship, and yet they attended once more. We should not be weary of well-doing.

II. The birth and name of this desired son. At length the Lord remembered Hannah, the very thing she desired (*v. 11*), and more she needed not desire, that was enough, for then she conceived and bore a

son. Though God seem long to forget his people's burdens, troubles, cares, and prayers, yet he will at length make it to appear that they are not out of his mind. This son the mother called *Samuel*, v. 20. Some make the etymology of this name to be much the same with that of *Ishmael*—*heard of God*, because the mother's prayers were remarkably heard, and he was an answer to them. Others, because of the reason she gives for the name, make it to signify *asked of God*. It comes nearly to the same; she designed by it to perpetuate the remembrance of God's favour to her in answering her prayers. Thus she designed, upon every mention of his name, to take the comfort to herself and to give God the glory of that gracious condescension. Note, Mercies in answer to prayer are to be remembered with peculiar expressions of thankfulness, as Ps. cxvi. 1, 2. How many seasonable deliverances and supplies may we call *Samuels*, *asked of God*; and whatever is so we are in a special manner engaged to devote to him. Hannah intended by this name to put her son in mind of the obligation he was under to be the Lord's, in consideration of this, that he was asked of God and was at the same time dedicated to him. A child of prayer is in a special manner bound to be a good child. Lemuel's mother reminds him that he was the *son of her vows*, Prov. xxxi. 2.

III. The close attendance Hannah gave to the nursing of him, not only because he was dear to her, but because he was devoted to God, and for him she nursed him. She therefore nursed him herself, and did not hang him on another's breast. We ought to take care of our children, not only with an eye to the law of nature as they are ours, but with an eye to the covenant of grace as they are given up to God. See Ezek. xvi. 20, 21. This sanctifies the nursing of them, when it is done as unto the Lord. Elkanah went up every year to worship at the tabernacle, and particularly to perform his vow, perhaps some vow he had made distinct from Hannah's if God would give him a son by her, v. 21. But Hannah, though she felt a warm regard for the courts of God's house, begged leave of her husband to stay at home; for the women were not under any obligation to go up to the three yearly feasts, as the men were. However Hannah had been accustomed to go, but now desired to be excused, 1. Because she would not be so long absent from her nursery. *Can a woman forget her sucking child?* We may suppose she kept constantly at home, for, if she had gone any where, she would have gone to Shiloh. Note, God will have mercy and not sacrifice. Those that are detained from public ordinances by the nursing and tending of little children may take comfort from this instance, and believe that, if they do that with an eye to God, he will graciously accept them therein, and though they

tarry at home they shall divide the spoil. 2. Because she would not go up to Shiloh till her son was big enough, not only to be taken thither, but to be left there; for, if once she took him thither, she thought she could never find in her heart to bring him back again. Note, Those who are steadfastly resolved to pay their vows may yet see good cause to defer the payment of them. *Every thing is beautiful in its season.* No animal was accepted in sacrifice till it had been for some time under the dam, Lev. xxii. 27. Fruit is best when it is ripe. Elkanah agrees to what she proposes (v. 23): *Do what seemeth thee good.* So far was he from delighting to cross her that he referred it entirely to her. *Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is*, when yoke-fellows thus draw even in the yoke, and accommodate themselves to one another, each thinking well of what the other does, especially in works of piety and charity. He adds a prayer: *Only the Lord establish his word*, that is, "God preserve the child through the perils of his infancy, that the solemn vow which God signified his acceptance of, by giving us the child, may be performed in its season, and so the whole matter may be accomplished." Note, Those that have in sincerity devoted their children to God may with comfort pray for them, that God will establish the word sealed to them at the same time that they were sealed for him.

IV. The solemn entering of this child into the service of the sanctuary. We may take it for granted that he was presented to the Lord at forty days old, as all the first-born were (Luke ii. 22, 23); but this is not mentioned, because there was nothing in it singular; but now that he was weaned he was presented, not to be redeemed. Some think it was as soon as he was weaned from the breast, which, the Jews say, was not till he was three years old; it is said she gave him suck till she had weaned him, v. 23. Others think it was not till he was weaned from childish things, at eight or ten years old. But I see no inconvenience in admitting such an extraordinary child as this into the tabernacle at three years old, to be educated among the children of the priests. It is said (v. 24), *The child was young*, but, being intelligent above his years, he was no trouble. None can begin too soon to be religious. *The child was a child*, so the Hebrew reads it, in his learning-age. *For whom shall he teach knowledge but those that are newly weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts?* Isa. xxviii. 9. Observe how she presented her child, 1. With a sacrifice; no less than three bullocks, with a meat-offering for each, v. 24. A bullock, perhaps, for each year of the child's life. Or one for a burnt-offering, another for a sin-offering, and the third for a peace-offering. So far was she from thinking that, by presenting her son to God, she made God her

debtor, that she thought it requisite by these slain offerings to seek God's acceptance of her living sacrifice. All our covenants with God for ourselves and ours must be made by sacrifice, the great sacrifice. 2. With a grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness in answer to prayer. This she makes to Eli, because he had encouraged her to hope for an answer of peace (v. 26, 27): "For this child I prayed. Here it was obtained by prayer, and here it is resigned to the prayer-hearing God. You have forgotten me, my lord, but I who now appear so cheerful am the woman, the very same, that three years ago stood by thee here weeping and praying, and this was the child I prayed for." Answers of prayer may thus be humbly triumphed in, to the glory of God. Here is a living testimony for God. "I am his witness that he is gracious (see Ps. lxxvi. 16—19); for this mercy, this comfort, I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition." See Ps. xxxiv. 2, 4, 6. Hannah does not remind Eli of it by adverting to the suspicion he had formerly expressed; she does not say, "I am the woman whom you passed that severe censure upon; what do you think of me now?" Good men ought not to be upbraided with their infirmities and oversights. They have themselves repented of them; let them hear no more of them. 3. With a full surrender of all her interest in this child unto the Lord (v. 28): *I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth.* And she repeats it, because she will never revoke it: *He shall be (a deodand) lent or given to the Lord.* Not that she designed to call for him back, as we do what we lend, but she uses this word *Shaol, lent*, because it is the same word that she had used before (v. 20, *I asked him of the Lord*), only in another conjugation. And (v. 27) the Lord gave me the petition which *I asked (Shaalti, in Kal)*, therefore *I have lent him (Hishilti, the same word in Hiphil)*, and so it gives another etymology of his name *Samuel*, not only *asked of God*, but *lent to God*. And observe, (1.) Whatever we give to God, it is what we have first asked and received from him. All our gifts to him were first his gifts to us. *Of thy own, Lord, have we given thee*, 1 Chron. xxix. 14, 16. (2.) Whatever we give to God may upon this account be said to be *lent* to him, that though we may not recal it, as a thing lent, yet he will certainly repay it, with interest, to our unspeakable advantage, particularly what is *given to his poor*, Prov. xix. 17. When by baptism we dedicate our children to God, let us remember that they were his before by a sovereign right, and that they are ours still so much the more to our comfort. Hannah resigns him to the Lord, not for a certain term of years, as children are sent apprentices, but *durante vitâ—as long as he liveth, he shall be lent unto the Lord*, a Nazarite for life. Such must our covenant with God be, a marriage-

covenant; as long as we live we must be his, and never forsake him.

Lastly, The child Samuel did his part beyond what could have been expected from one of his years; for of him that seems to be spoken, *He worshipped the Lord there*, that is, *he said his prayers*. He was no doubt extraordinarily forward (we have known children that have discovered some sense of religion very young), and his mother, designing him for the sanctuary, took particular care to train him up to that which was to be his work in the sanctuary. Note, Little children should learn betimes to worship God. Their parents should instruct them in his worship and bring them to it, put them upon engaging in it as well as they can, and God will graciously accept them and teach them to do better.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. Hannah's song of thanksgiving to God for his favour to her in giving her Samuel, ver. 1—10. II. Their return to their family, with Eli's blessing, ver. 11, 20. The increase of their family, ver. 21. Samuel's growth and improvement (ver. 11, 18, 21, 26), and the care Hannah took to clothe him, ver. 19. III. The great wickedness of Eli's sons, ver. 12—17, 22. IV. The over-mild reproof that Eli gave them for it, ver. 23—25. V. The justly dreadful message God sent him by a prophet, threatening the ruin of his family for the wickedness of his sons, ver. 27—30.

AND Hannah prayed, and said: My heart rejoiceth in the LORD; mine horn is exalted in the LORD; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. 2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. 3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. 4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. 5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. 6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. 7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. 8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them. 9 He will keep the feet of his saints,

and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

We have here Hannah's thanksgiving, dictated, not only by the spirit of prayer, but by the spirit of prophecy. Her petition for the mercy she desired we had before (*ch. i* 11), and here we have her return of praise; in both *out of the abundance of a heart* deeply affected (in the former with her own wants, and in the latter with God's goodness) *her mouth spoke*. Observe in general, 1. When she had received mercy from God she owned it, with thankfulness to his praise. Not like the nine lepers, Luke xvii. 17. Praise is our rent, our tribute. We are unjust if we do not pay it. 2. The mercy she had received was an answer to prayer, and therefore she thought herself especially obliged to give thanks for it. What we win by prayer we may wear with comfort, and must wear with praise. 3. Her thanksgiving is here called a prayer: *Hannah prayed*; for thanksgiving is an essential part of prayer. In every address to God we must express a grateful regard to him as our benefactor. Nay, and thanksgiving for mercies received shall be accepted as a petition for further mercy. 4. From this particular mercy which she had received from God she takes occasion, with an elevated and enlarged heart, to speak glorious things of God and of his government of the world for the good of his church. Whatever at any time gives rise to our praises in this manner they should be raised. 5. Her prayer was mental: *Her voice was not heard*; but in her thanksgiving she spoke, that all might hear her. She made her supplication *with groanings that could not be uttered*, but now her lips were opened to *show forth God's praise*. 6. This thanksgiving is here left upon record for the encouragement of those of the weaker sex to attend the throne of grace. God will regard their prayers and praises. The virgin Mary's song has great affinity with this of Hannah, Luke i. 46. Three things we have in this thanksgiving:—

I. Hannah's triumph in God, in his glorious perfections, and the great things he had done for her, *v. 1—3*. Observe,

1. What great things she says of God. She takes little notice of the particular mercy she was now rejoicing in, does not commend Samuel for the prettiest child, the most toward and sensible for his age that she ever saw, as fond parents are too apt to do. No, she overlooks the gift, and praises the giver;

whereas most forget the giver and fasten only on the gift. Every stream should lead us to the fountain; and the favours we receive from God should raise our admiration of the infinite perfections there are in God. There may be other Samuels, but no other Jehovah. *There is none besides thee*. Note, God is to be praised as a peerless being, and of unparalleled perfection. This glory is due unto his name, to own not only that there is *none like him*, but that there is *none besides him*. All others were pretenders, Ps. xviii. 31. Four of God's glorious attributes Hannah here celebrates the glory of:—(1.) His unspotted purity. This is that attribute which is most praised in the upper world, by those that always behold his face, Isa. vi. 3; Rev. iv. 8. When Israel triumphed over the Egyptians God was praised as *glorious in holiness*, Exod. xv. 11. So here, in Hannah's triumph, *There is none holy as the Lord*. It is the rectitude of his nature, his infinite agreement with himself, and the equity of his government and judgment in all the administrations of both. At the remembrance of this we ought to give thanks. (2.) His almighty power: *Neither is there any rock (or any strength, for so the word is sometimes rendered) like our God*. Hannah had experienced a mighty support by staying herself upon him, and therefore speaks as she had found, and seems to refer to that of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 31. (3.) His unsearchable wisdom: *The Lord, the Judge of all, is a God of knowledge*; he clearly and perfectly sees into the character of every person and the merits of every cause, and he gives knowledge and understanding to those that seek them of him. (4.) His unerring justice: *By him actions are weighed*. His own are so, in his eternal counsels; the actions of the children of men are so, in the balances of his judgment, so that he will *render to every man according to his work*, and is not mistaken in what any man is or does.

2. How she solaces herself in these things. What we give God the glory of we may take the comfort of. Hannah does so, (1.) In holy joy: *My heart rejoiceth in the Lord*; not so much in her son as in her God; he is to be the gladness of our joy (Ps. xliii. 4), and our joy must not terminate in any thing short of him: *"I rejoice in thy salvation; not only in this particular favour to me, but in the salvation of thy people Israel, those salvations especially which this child will be an instrument of, and that, above all, by Christ which those are but the types of."* (2.) In holy triumph: *"My horn is exalted; not only is my reputation saved by my having a son, but greatly raised by having such a son."* We read of some of the singers whom David appointed to lift up the horn, an instrument of music, in praising God (1 Chron. xxv. 5), so that, *My horn is exalted* means this, "My praises are very much elevated to an unusual strain." *Exalted in the Lord*; God is to

have the honour of all our exaltations, and in him must we triumph. *My mouth is enlarged*, that is, "Now I have wherewith to answer those that reproached me." He that has his quiver full of arrows, his house full of children, shall not be ashamed to *speak with the enemy in the gate*, Ps. cxxvii. 5.

3. How she herewith silences those that set up themselves as rivals with God and rebels against him (v. 3): *Talk no more so exceedingly proudly*. Let not Peninnah and her children upbraid her any more with her confidence in God and praying to him: at length she found it not in vain. See Mic. vii. 10, *Then she that is my enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her that said, Where is thy God?* Or perhaps it was below her to take so much notice of Peninnah, and her malice, in this song; but this is intended as a check to the insolence of the Philistines, and other enemies of God and Israel, that *set their mouth against the heavens*, Ps. lxxiii. 9 "Let this put them to silence and shame; he that has thus judged for me against my adversary will judge for his people against all theirs."

II. The notice she takes of the wisdom and sovereignty of the divine providence, in its disposals of the affairs of the children of men; such are the vicissitudes of them, and such the strange and sudden turns and revolutions of them, that it is often found a very short step between the height of prosperity and the depth of adversity. *God has not only set the one over against the other* (Eccl. vii. 14), but the one very near the other, and no gulf fixed between them, that we may *rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not*.

1. The strong are soon weakened and the weak are soon strengthened, when God pleases, v. 4. On the one hand, if he speak the word, *the bows of the mighty men are broken*; they are disarmed, disabled to do as they have before done and as they have designed to do. Those have been worsted in battle who seemed upon all accounts to have the advantage on their side, and thought themselves sure of victory. See Ps. xlvi. 9; xxxvii. 15, 17. Particular persons are soon weakened by sickness and age, and they find that the bow does not long abide in strength; many a mighty man who has gloried in his might has found it a deceitful bow, that failed him when he trusted to it. On the other hand, if the Lord speak the word, those who stumble through weakness, who were so feeble that they could not go straight or steady, are *girded with strength*, in body and mind, and are able to bring great things to pass. Those who were weakened by sickness return to their vigour (Job xxxiii. 25), and those who were brought down by sorrow shall recover their comfort, which will *confirm the weak hands and the feeble knees*, Isa. xxxv. 3. Victory turns in favour of that side that was given up for gone, and even *the lame take the prey*, Isa. xxxiii. 23.

2. The rich are soon impoverished and the poor strangely enriched on a sudden, v. 5. Providence sometimes does so blast men's estates and cross their endeavours, and with a fire not blown consume their increase, that those who were full (their barns full, and their bags full, their *houses full of good things*, Job xxii. 18, and their *bellies full of these hidden treasures*, Ps. xvii. 14) have been reduced to such straits and extremities as to want the necessary supports of life, and to *hire out themselves for bread*, and they must dig, since to *beg they are ashamed*. *Riches flee away* (Prov. xxiii. 5), and leave those miserable who, when they had them, placed their happiness in them. To those that have been full and free poverty and slavery must needs be doubly grievous. But, on the other hand, sometimes Providence so orders it that *those who are hungry cease*, that is, cease to hire out themselves for bread as they have done. Having, by God's blessing on their industry, got beforehand in the world, and enough to live upon at ease, *they shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more*. This is not to be ascribed to fortune, nor merely to men's wisdom or folly. *Riches are not to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill* (Eccl. ix. 11), nor is it always men's own fault that they become poor, but (v. 7) *the Lord maketh some poor and maketh others rich*; the impoverishing of one is the enriching of another, and it is God's doing. To some he gives power to get wealth, from others he takes away power to keep the wealth they have. Are we poor? God made us poor, which is a good reason why we should be content, and reconcile ourselves to our condition. Are we rich? God made us rich, which is a good reason why we should be thankful, and serve him cheerfully in the abundance of good things he gives us. It may be understood of the same person; those that were rich God makes poor, and after awhile makes rich again, as Job; he gave, he takes away, and then gives again. Let not the rich be proud and secure, for God can soon make them poor; let not the poor despond and despair, for God can in due time enrich them again.

3. Empty families are replenished and numerous families diminished and made few. This is the instance that comes close to the occasion of the thanksgiving: *The barren hath borne seven*, meaning herself, for, though at present she had but one son, yet that one being a Nazarite, devoted to God and employed in his immediate service, he was to her as good as seven. Or it is the language of her faith. Now that she had one she hoped for more, and was not disappointed; she had five more (v. 21), so that if we reckon Samuel but for two, as we well may, she has the number she promised herself: *the barren hath borne seven*, while, on the other hand, *she that hath many children has waxed feeble*, and hath left bearing. She

says no more. Peninnah is now mortified and crest-fallen. The tradition of the Jews is that when Hannah bore one child Peninnah buried two. There are many instances both of the increase of families that were considerable and the extinguishing of families that made a figure, Job xxii. 23; Ps. cvii. 35, &c.

4. God is the sovereign Lord of life and death (v. 6): *The Lord killeth and maketh alive*. Understand it, (1.) Of God's sovereign dominion and universal agency, in the lives and deaths of the children of men. He presides in births and burials. Whenever any die it is God that directs the arrows of death. *The Lord killeth*. Death is his messenger, strikes whom and when he bids; none are brought to the dust but it is he that brings them down, for in his hand are the *keys of death and the grave*, Rev. i. 18. Whenever any are born it is he that makes them alive. *None knows what is the way of the spirit*, but this we know, that it comes from the *Father of spirits*. Whenever any are recovered from sickness, and delivered from imminent perils, it is God that bringeth up; for *to him belong the issues from death*. (2.) Of the distinction he makes between some and others: *He killeth some, and maketh, that is, keepeth, others alive* that were in the same danger (in war, suppose, or pestilence), two in a bed together, it may be, one taken by death and the other left alive. *Even so, Father, because it seemed good in thy eyes*. Some that were most likely to live are brought down to the grave, and others that were as likely to die are brought up; for living and dying do not go by likelihoods. God's providences towards some are killing, ruining to their comforts, and towards others at the same time reviving. (3.) Of the change he makes with one and the same person: *He killeth and bringeth down to the grave*, that is, he brings even to death's door, and then revives and raises up, when even life was despaired of and a sentence of death received, 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. *He turns to destruction*, and then says, *Return*, Ps. xc. 3. Nothing is too hard for God to do, no, not the quickening of the dead, and putting life into dry bones.

5. Advancement and abasement are both from him. He brings some low and lifts up others (v. 7), humbles the proud and gives grace and honour to the lowly, lays those in the dust that would vie with the God above them and trample upon all about them (Job xl. 12, 13), but lifts up those with his salvation that humble themselves before him, Jam. iv. 10. Or it may be understood of the same persons: those whom he had brought low, when they are sufficiently humbled, he lifteth up. This is enlarged upon, v. 8. *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust*, a low and mean condition, nay, from the dunghill, a base and servile condition, loathed, and despised, *to set them among princes*. See Ps. cxiii. 7, 8. Promotion comes not by chance, but from the counsel

of God, which often prefers those that were very unlikely and that men thought very unworthy. Joseph and Daniel, Moses and David, were thus strangely advanced, from a prison to a palace, from a sheep-hook to a sceptre. The princes they are set among may be tempted to disdain them, but God can establish the honour which he gives thus surprisingly, and make them even to *inherit the throne of glory*. Let not those whom Providence has thus preferred be upbraided with the dust and dunghill they are raised out of, for the meaner their beginnings were the more they are favoured, and God is glorified, in their advancement, if it be by lawful and honourable means.

6. A reason is given for all these dispensations which obliges us to acquiesce in them, how surprising soever they are: *For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's*. (1.) If we understand this literally, it intimates God's almighty power, which cannot be controlled. He upholds the whole creation, founded the earth, and still sustains it by the word of his power. What cannot he do in the affairs of families and kingdoms, far beyond our conception and expectation, *who hangs the earth upon nothing?* Job xxvi. 7. But, (2.) If we understand it figuratively, it intimates his incontestable sovereignty, which cannot be disputed. The princes and great ones of the earth, the directors of states and governments, are the *pillars of the earth*, Ps. lxxv. 3. On these hinges the affairs of the world seem to turn, but they are the Lord's, Ps. xlvii. 9. From him they have their power, and therefore he may advance whom he pleases; and who may say, *What doest thou?*

III. A prediction of the preservation and advancement of all God's faithful friends, and the destruction of all his and their enemies. Having testified her joyful triumph in what God had done, and is doing, she concludes with joyful hopes of what he would do, v. 9, 10. Pious affections (says bishop Patrick) in those days rose many times to the height of prophecy, whereby God continued in that nation his true religion, in the midst of their idolatrous inclinations. This prophecy may refer, 1. More immediately to the government of Israel by Samuel, and by David whom he was employed to anoint. The Israelites, God's saints, should be protected and delivered; the Philistines, their enemies, should be conquered and subdued, and particularly by *thunder*, ch. vii. 10. Their dominions should be enlarged, king David strengthened and greatly exalted, and Israel (that in the time of the judges had made so small a figure and had much ado to subsist) should now shortly become great and considerable, and give law to all its neighbours. An extraordinary change that was; and the birth of Samuel was, as it were, the dawning of that day. But, 2. We have reason to think that this prophecy looks further, to the



kingdom of Christ, and the administration of that kingdom of grace, of which she now comes to speak, having spoken so largely of the kingdom of providence. And here is the first time that we meet with the name *Messiah*, or *his Anointed*. The ancient expositors, both Jewish and Christian, make it to look beyond David, to the Son of David. Glorious things are here spoken of the kingdom of the Mediator, both before and since his incarnation; for the method of the administration of it, both by the eternal Word and by that Word made flesh, is much the same. Concerning that kingdom we are here assured, (1.) That all the loyal subjects of it shall be carefully and powerfully protected (*v. 9*): *He will keep the feet of his saints*. There are a people in the world that are God's saints, his select and sanctified ones; and he will keep their feet, that is, all that belongs to them shall be under his protection, down to their very feet, the lowest part of the body. If he will keep their feet, much more their head and hearts. Or he will keep their feet, that is, he will secure the ground they stand on, and establish their goings; he will set a guard of grace upon their affections and actions, that their feet may neither wander out of the way nor stumble in the way. When their feet are ready to slip (*Ps. lxxiii. 2*) *his mercy holdeth them up* (*Ps. xciv. 18*) and *keepeth them from falling*, *Jude 24*. While we keep God's ways he will keep our feet. See *Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24*. (2.) That all the powers engaged against it shall not be able to effect the ruin of it. By strength shall no man prevail. God's strength is engaged for the church; and, while it is so, man's strength shall not prevail against it. The church seems destitute of strength, her friends few and feeble, but prevalency does not go by human strength, *Ps. xxxiii. 16*. God neither needs it for him (*Ps. cxlvii. 10*) nor dreads it against him. (3.) That all the enemies of it will certainly be broken and brought down: *The wicked shall be silent in darkness, v. 9*. They shall be struck both blind and dumb, not be able to see their way nor have any thing to say for themselves. Darned sinners are sentenced to utter darkness, and in it they will be for ever speechless, *Matt. xxii. 12, 13*. The wicked are called *the adversaries of the Lord*, and it is foretold (*v. 10*) that they shall be broken to pieces. Their designs against his kingdom among men will all be dashed, and they themselves destroyed; how can those speed better that are in arms against Omnipotence? See *Luke xix. 27*. God has many ways of doing it, and, rather than fail, from *heaven shall he thunder upon them*, and so, not only put them in terror and consternation, but bring them to destruction. Who can stand before God's thunderbolts? (4.) That the conquests of this kingdom shall extend themselves to distant regions: *The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth*. David's victories and dominions

reached far, but the *utmost parts of the earth* are promised to the Messiah for his possession (*Ps. ii. 8*), to be either reduced to his golden sceptre or ruined by his iron rod. God is Judge of all, and he will judge for his people against his and their enemies, *Ps. cx. 5, 6*. (5.) That the power and honour of Messiah the prince shall grow and increase more and more: *He shall give strength unto his king*, for the accomplishing of his great undertaking (*Ps. lxxxix. 21*, and see *Luke xxii. 43*), strengthen him to go through the difficulties of his humiliation, and in his exaltation he will *lift up the head* (*Ps. cx. 7*), lift up the horn, the power and honour, of his *anointed*, and *make him higher than the kings of the earth*, *Ps. lxxxix. 27*. This crowns the triumph, and is, more than any thing, the matter of her exaltation. Her *horn is exalted* (*v. 1*) because she foresees the horn of the Messiah will be so. This secures the hope. The subjects of Christ's kingdom will be safe, and the enemies of it will be ruined, for the anointed, the Lord Christ, is girded with strength, and is able to save and destroy unto the uttermost.

11 And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest. 12 Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD. 13 And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; 14 And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. 15 Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. 16 And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, *Nay*; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. 17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD. 18 But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. 19 Moreover

his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. 21 And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD. 22 Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 23 And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. 24 Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD's people to transgress. 25 If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them. 26 And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

In these verses we have the good character and posture of Elkanah's family, and the bad character and posture of Eli's family. The account of these two is observably interwoven throughout this whole paragraph, as if the historian intended to set the one over against the other, that they might set off one another. The devotion and good order of Elkanah's family aggravated the iniquity of Eli's house; while the wickedness of Eli's sons made Samuel's early piety appear the more bright and illustrious.

I. Let us see how well things went in Elkanah's family and how much better than formerly. 1. Eli dismissed them from the house of the Lord, when they had entered their little son there, with a blessing, v. 20. He blessed as one having authority: *The Lord give thee more children of this woman, for the loan that is lent to the Lord.* If Hannah had then had many children, it would not have been such a generous piece of piety to part with one out of many for the service of the tabernacle; but when she had but one, an only one whom she loved, her Isaac, to present him to the Lord was such an act

of heroic piety as should by no means lose its reward. As when Abraham had offered Isaac he received the promise of a numerous issue (Gen. xxii. 16, 17), so did Hannah, when she had presented Samuel unto the Lord a living sacrifice. Note, What is lent to the Lord will certainly be repaid with interest, to our unspeakable advantage, and oftentimes in kind. Hannah resigns one child to God, and is recompensed with five; for Eli's blessing took effect (v. 21): *She bore three sons and two daughters.* There is nothing lost by lending to God or losing for him; it shall be repaid a hundred-fold, Matt. xix. 29. 2. They returned to their own habitation. This is twice mentioned, v. 11, and again v. 20. It was very pleasant to attend at God's house, to bless him, and to be blessed of him. But they have a family at home that must be looked after, and thither they return, cheerfully leaving the dear little one behind them, knowing they left him in a good place; and it does not appear that he cried after them, but was as willing to stay as they were to leave him, so soon did he *put away childish things* and behave like a man. 3. They kept up their constant attendance at the house of God with their yearly sacrifice, v. 19. They did not think that their son's ministering there would excuse them, or that that offering must serve instead of other offerings; but, having found the benefit of drawing near to God, they would omit no appointed season for it, and now they had one loadstone more in Shiloh to draw them thither. We may suppose they went thither to see their child oftener than once a year, for it was not ten miles from Ramah; but their annual visit is taken notice of because then they brought their yearly sacrifice, and then Hannah fitted up her son (and some think oftener than once a year) with a new suit of clothes, a little coat (v. 19) and every thing belonging to it. She undertook to find him with clothes during his apprenticeship at the tabernacle, and took care he should be well provided, that he might appear the more decent and sightly in his ministration, and to encourage him in his towardly beginnings. Parents must take care that their children want nothing that is fit for them, whether they are with them or from them; but those that are dutiful and hopeful, and minister to the Lord, must be thought worthy of double care and kindness. 4. The child Samuel did very well. Four separate times he is mentioned in these verses, and two things we are told of:—(1.) The service he did to the Lord. He did well indeed, for he ministered to the Lord (v. 11, 18) according as his capacity was. He learned his catechism and was constant to his devotions, soon learned to read, and took a pleasure in the book of the law, and thus he ministered to the Lord. He ministered before Eli, that is, under his inspection, and as he ordered him, not before Eli's sons; all parties were agreed that they

were unfit to be his tutors. Perhaps he attended immediately on Eli's person, was ready to him to fetch and bring as he had occasion, and that is called *ministering to the Lord*. Some little services perhaps he was employed in about the altar, though much under the age appointed by the law for the Levites' ministration. He could light a candle, or hold a dish, or run on an errand, or shut a door; and, because he did this with a pious disposition of mind it is called *ministering to the Lord*, and great notice is taken of it. After awhile he did his work so well that Eli appointed that he should minister with a *linen ephod* as the priests did (though he was no priest), because he saw that God was with him. Note, Little children must learn betimes to *minister to the Lord*. Parents must train them up to it, and God will accept them. Particularly let them learn to pay respect to their teachers, as Samuel to Eli. None can begin too soon to be religious. See Ps. viii. 2, and Matt. xxi. 15, 16. (2.) The blessing he received from the Lord: He *grew before the Lord*, as a tender plant (v. 21), *grew on* (v. 26) in strength and stature, and especially in wisdom and understanding and fitness for business. Note, Those young people that serve God as well as they can will obtain grace to improve, that they may serve him better. Those that are planted in God's house shall *flourish*, Ps. xcii. 13. *He was in favour with the Lord and with man*. Note, It is a great encouragement to children to be tractable, and virtuous, and good betimes, that if they be both God and man will love them. Such children are the darlings both of heaven and earth. What is here said of Samuel is said of our blessed Saviour, that great example, Luke ii. 52.

11. Let us now see how ill things went in Eli's family, though seated at the very door of the tabernacle. The nearer the church the further from God.

1. The abominable wickedness of Eli's sons (v. 12): *The sons of Eli were sons of Belial*. It is emphatically expressed. Nothing appears to the contrary but that Eli himself was a very good man, and no doubt had educated his sons well, giving them good instructions, setting them good examples, and putting up many a good prayer for them; and yet, when they grew up, they proved *sons of Belial*, profane wicked men, and arrant rakes: *They knew not the Lord*. They could not but have a notional knowledge of God and his law, a form of knowledge (Rom. ii. 20), yet, because their practice was not conformable to it, they are spoken of as wholly ignorant of God; they lived as if they knew nothing at all of God. Note, Parents cannot give grace to their children, nor does it run in the blood. Many that are sincerely pious themselves live to see those that come from them notoriously impious and profane; *for the race is not to the swift*. Eli was high priest and judge in Israel. His sons were

priests by their birth. Their character was sacred and honourable, and obliged them, for their reputation-sake, to observe decorum. They were resident at the fountain-head both of magistracy and ministry, and yet they were *sons of Belial*, and their honour, power, and learning, made them so much the worse. They did not go to *serve other gods*, as those did that lived at a distance from the altar, for from the house of God they had their wealth and dignity; but, which was worse, they managed the service of God as if he had been one of the dunghill deities of the heathen. It is hard to say which dishonours God more, idolatry or profaneness, especially the profaneness of the priests. Let us see the wickedness of Eli's sons; and it is a sad sight.

(1.) They profaned the offerings of the Lord, and made a gain to themselves, or rather a gratification of their own luxury, out of them. God had provided competently for them out of the sacrifices. *The offerings of the Lord made by fire* were a considerable branch of their revenue, but not enough to please them; they served not the God of Israel, but their own bellies (Rom. xvi. 18), being such as the prophet calls *greedy dogs that can never have enough*, Isa. lvi. 11. [1.] They robbed the offerers, and seized for themselves some of their part of the sacrifice of the peace-offerings. The priests had for their share the *wave-breast* and the *heave shoulder* (Lev. vii. 34), but these did not content them; when the flesh was boiling for the offerer to feast upon religiously with his friends, they sent a servant with a flesh-hook of three teeth, a trident, and that must be struck into the pot, and whatever that brought up the priest must have (v. 13, 14), and the people, out of their great veneration, suffered this to grow into a custom, so that after awhile prescription was pleaded for this manifest wrong. [2.] They stepped in before God himself, and encroached upon his right too. *As if it were a small thing to weary men, they wearied my God also*, Isa. vii. 13. Be it observed, to the honour of Israel, that though the people tamely yielded to their unwarrantable demands from them, yet they were very solicitous that God should not be robbed: *Let them not fail to burn the fat presently*, v. 16. Let the altar have its due, for that is the main matter. Unless God have the fat, they can feast with little comfort upon the flesh. It was a shame that the priests should need to be thus admonished by the people of their duty; but they regarded not the admonition. The priest will be served first, and will take what he thinks fit of the fat too, for he is weary of boiled meat, he must have roast, and, in order to that, they must give it to him raw; and if the offerer dispute it, though not in his own favour (let the priest take what he pleases of his part) but in favour of the altar (let them be sure to *burn the fat first*), even the priest's servant had grown so very imperious that he would either have it

now or take it by force, than which there could not be a greater affront to God nor a greater abuse to the people. The effect was, *First*, That God was displeas'd: *The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, v. 17.* Nothing is more provoking to God than the profanation of sacred things, and men serving their lusts with the offerings of the Lord. *Secondly*, That religion suffered by it: *Men abhorred the offerings of the Lord.* All good men abhorred their management of the offerings, and too many insensibly fell into a contempt of the offerings themselves for their sakes. It was the people's sin to think the worse of God's institutions, but it was the much greater sin of the priests that gave them occasion to do so. Nothing brings a greater reproach upon religion than ministers' covetousness, sensuality, and imperiousness. In the midst of this sad story comes in the repeated mention of Samuel's devotion. *But Samuel ministered before the Lord*, as an instance of the power of God's grace, in preserving him pure and pious in the midst of this wicked crew; and this helped to keep up the sinking credit of the sanctuary in the minds of the people, who, when they had said all they could against Eli's sons, could not but admire Samuel's seriousness, and speak well of religion for his sake.

(2.) They debauched the women that came to worship at the door of the tabernacle, *v. 22.* They had wives of their own, but were like *fed horses*, Jer. v. 8. To have gone to the harlots' houses, the common prostitutes, would have been abominable wickedness, but to use the interest which as priests they had in those women that had devout dispositions and were religiously inclined, and to bring them to commit this wickedness, was such horrid impiety as one can scarcely think it possible that men who called themselves priests should ever be guilty of. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and tremble, O earth!* No words can sufficiently express the villany of such practices as these.

2. The reproof which Eli gave his sons for this their wickedness: *Eli was very old (v. 22)* and could not himself inspect the service of the tabernacle as he had done, but left all to his sons, who, because of the infirmities of his age, slighted him, and did what they would. However, he was told of the wickedness of his sons, and we may well imagine what a heart-breaking it was to him, and how much it added to the burdens of his age; but it should seem he did not so much as reprove them till he heard of their debauching the women, and then he thought fit to give them a check. Had he rebuked them for their greediness and luxury, this might have been prevented. Young people should be told of their faults as soon as it is perceived that they begin to be extravagant, lest their hearts be hardened. Now concerning the reproof he gave them observe,

(1.) That it was very just and rational.

That which he said was very proper. [1.] He tells them that the matter of fact was too plain to be denied and too public to be concealed: "*I hear of your evil dealings by all this people, v. 23.* It is not the surmise of one or two, but the avowed testimony of many; all your neighbours cry out shame on you, and bring their complaints to me, expecting that I should redress the grievance."

[2.] He shows them the bad consequences of it, that they not only sinned, but made Israel to sin, and would have the people's sin to answer for as well as their own: "You that should turn men from iniquity (Mal. ii. 6), *you make the Lord's people to transgress*, and corrupt the nation instead of reforming it; you tempt people to go and serve other gods when they see the God of Israel so ill served."

[3.] He warns them of the danger they brought themselves into by it, *v. 25.* He intimates to them what God afterwards told him, that the iniquity would not be purged with sacrifice nor offering, *ch. iii. 14.* *If one man sin against another*, the judge (that is, the priest, who was appointed to be the judge in many cases, Deut. xvii. 9) *shall judge him*, shall undertake his cause, arbitrate the matter, and make atonement for the offender; *but if a man sin against the Lord* (that is, if a priest profane the holy things of the Lord, if a man that deals with God for others do himself affront him) *who shall entreat for him?* Eli was himself a judge, and had often made intercession for transgressors, but, says he, "You that *sin against the Lord*," that is, "against the law and honour of God, in those very things which immediately pertain to him, and by which reconciliation is to be made, how can I entreat for you?" Their condition was deplorable indeed when their own father could not speak a good word for them, nor could have the face to appear as their advocate. Sins against the remedy, the atonement itself, are most dangerous, *treading under foot the blood of the covenant*, for then there remains no more sacrifice, Heb. x. 26.

(2.) It was too mild and gentle. He should have rebuked them sharply. Their crimes deserved sharpness; their temper needed it; the softness of his dealing with them would but harden them the more. The animadversion was too easy when he said, *It is no good report.* He should have said, "It is a shameful scandalous thing, and not to be suffered!" Whether it was because he loved them or because he feared them that he dealt thus tenderly with them, it was certainly an evidence of his want of zeal for the honour of God and his sanctuary. He bound them over to God's judgment, but he should have taken cognizance of their crimes himself, as high priest and judge, and have restrained and punished them. What he said was right, but it was not enough. Note, It is sometimes necessary that we put an edge upon the reproofs we give. There are those that must be saved *with fear*, Jude 23.

3. Their obstinacy against this reproof. His lenity did not at all work upon them: *They hearkened not to their father*, though he was also a judge. They had no regard either to his authority or to his affection, which was to them *an evident token of perdition*; it was because the Lord would *slay them*. They had long hardened their hearts, and now God, in a way of righteous judgment, hardened their hearts, and seared their consciences, and withheld from them the grace they had resisted and forfeited. Note, Those that are deaf to the reproofs of wisdom are manifestly marked for ruin. The Lord has *determined to destroy them*, 2 Chron. xxv. 16. See Prov. xxix. 1. Immediately upon this, Samuel's tractableness is again mentioned (v. 26), to shame their obstinacy: *The child Samuel grew*. God's grace is his own; he denied it to the sons of the high priest and gave it to the child of an obscure country Levite.

27 And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? 28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel *to be my priest*, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? 29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded *in my habitation*; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? 30 Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that thy house*, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. 31 Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. 32 And thou shalt see an enemy *in my habitation*, in all *the wealth which God shall give Israel*: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. 33 And the man of thine, *whom I shall not cut off from mine*

altar, *shall be to consume thine eyes*, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. 34 And this *shall be a sign unto thee*, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. 35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, *that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind*: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. 36 And it shall come to pass, *that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him* for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

Eli reproved his sons too gently, and did not threaten them as he should, and therefore God sent a prophet to him to reprove him sharply, and to threaten him, because, by his indulgence of them, he had strengthened their hands in their wickedness. It good men be wanting in their duty, and by their carelessness and remissness contribute any thing to the sin of sinners, they must expect both to hear of it and to smart for it. Eli's family was now nearer to God than all *the families of the earth*, and therefore he will *punish them*, Amos iii. 2. The message is sent to Eli himself, because God would bring him to repentance and save him; not to his sons, whom he had determined to destroy. And it might have been a means of awakening him to do his duty at last, and so to have prevented the judgment, but we do not find it had any great effect upon him. The message this prophet delivers from God is very close.

I. He reminds him of the great things God had done for the house of his fathers and for his family. He appeared to Aaron in Egypt (Exod. iv. 27), in the house of bondage, as a token of further favour which he designed for him, v. 27. He advanced him to the priesthood, entailed it upon his family, and thereby dignified it above any of the families of Israel. He entrusted him with honourable work, to offer on God's altar, *to burn incense*, and to wear that ephod in which was the breast-plate of judgment. He settled upon him an honourable maintenance, a share out of *all the offerings made by fire*, v. 28. What could he have done more for them, to engage them to be faithful to him? Note, The distinguishing favours we have received from God, especially those of the spiritual priesthood, are great aggravations of sin, and will be remembered against us in the day of

account, if we profane our crown and betray our trusts, Deut. xxxii. 6; 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8.

II. He exhibits a high charge against him and his family. His children did wickedly, and he connived at it, and thereby involved himself in the guilt; the indictment therefore runs against them all, v. 29. 1. His sons had impiously profaned the holy things of God: "*You kick at my sacrifice which I have commanded; not only trample upon the institution as a mean thing, but spurn at it as a thing you hate to be tied up to.*" They did the utmost despite imaginable to the offerings of the Lord when they committed all that outrage and rapine about them that we read of, and violently plundered the pots on which, in effect, *Holiness to the Lord* was written (Zech. xiv. 20), and took that fat to themselves which God had appointed to be burnt on his altar. 2. Eli had bolstered them up in it, by not punishing their insolence and impiety: "*Thou for thy part honourst thy sons above me,*" that is, "*thou hadst rather see my offerings disgraced by their profanation of them than see thy sons disgraced by a legal censure upon them for so doing, which ought to have been inflicted, even to suspension and deprivation ab officio et beneficio—of their office and its emoluments.*" Those that allow and countenance their children in any evil way, and do not use their authority to restrain and punish them, do in effect *honour them more than God*, being more tender of their reputation than of his glory and more desirous to humour them than to honour him. 3. They had all shared in the gains of the sacrilege. It is to be feared that Eli himself, though he disliked and reproved the abuses they committed, yet did not forbear to eat of the roast meat they sacrilegiously got, v. 15. He was a *fat heavy man* (ch. iv. 18), and therefore it is charged upon the whole family (though Hophni and Phinehas were principally guilty), *You make yourselves fat with the chief of all the offerings.* God gave them sufficient to feed them, but that would not suffice; they made themselves fat, and served their lusts with that which God was to be served with. See Hos. iv. 8.

III. He declares the cutting off of the entail of the high priesthood from his family (v. 30): "*The Lord God of Israel, who is jealous for his own honour and Israel's, says, and lets thee know it, that thy commission is revoked and superseded.*" *I said, indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father Ithamar (for from that younger son of Aaron Eli descended), should walk before me for ever.* Upon what occasion the dignity of the high priesthood was transferred from the family of Eleazar to that of Ithamar does not appear; but it seems this had been done, and Eli stood fair to have that honour perpetuated to his posterity. But observe, the promise carried its own condition along with it: *They shall walk before me for ever*, that is, "*they shall have the honour, provided they faithfully do*

the service." *Walking before God* is the great condition of the covenant, Gen. xvii.

I. Let them set me before their face, and I will set them before my face continually (Ps. xli. 12), otherwise not. But now the Lord says, *Be it far from me.* "Now that you cast me off you can expect no other than that I should cast you off; you will not walk before me as you should, and therefore you shall not." Such wicked and abusive servants God will discard, and turn out of his service. Some think there is a further reach in this recal of the grant, and that it was not only to be fulfilled shortly in the deposing of the posterity of Eli, when Zadok, who descended from Eleazar, was put in Abiathar's room, but it was to have its complete accomplishment at length in the total abolition of the Levitical priesthood by the priesthood of Christ.

IV. He gives a good reason for this revocation, taken from a settled and standing rule of God's government, according to which all must expect to be dealt with (like that by which Cain was tried, Gen. iv. 7): *Those that honour me I will honour, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

1. Observe in general, (1.) That God is the fountain of honour and dishonour; he can exalt the meanest and put contempt upon the greatest. (2.) As we deal with God we must expect to be dealt with by him, and yet more favourably than we deserve. See Ps. xviii. 25, 26.

2. Particularly, (1.) Be it spoken, to the everlasting reputation of religion or of serious godliness, that it gives honour to God and puts honour upon men. By it we seek and serve the glory of God, and he will be behind-hand with none that do so, but here and hereafter will secure their glory. The way to be truly great is to be truly good. If we humble and deny ourselves in any thing to honour God, and have a single eye to him in it, we may depend upon this promise, he will put the best honour upon us. See John xii. 26. (2.) Be it spoken, to the everlasting reproach of impiety or profaneness, that this does dishonour to God (despises the greatest and best of beings, whom angels adore) and will bring dishonour upon men, for those that do so shall be lightly esteemed; not only God will lightly esteem them (that perhaps they will not regard, as those that honour him value his honour, of whom therefore it is said, *I will honour them*), but they shall be lightly esteemed by all the world; the very honour they are proud of shall be laid in the dust; they shall see themselves despised by all mankind, their names a reproach; when they are gone, their memory shall rot, and, when they rise again, it shall be to everlasting shame and contempt. The dishonour which their impotent malice puts upon God and his omnipotent justice will return upon their own heads, Ps. lxxix. 12.

V. He foretels the particular judgments

which should come upon his family, to its perpetual ignominy. A curse should be entailed upon his posterity, and a terrible curse it is, and shows how jealous God is in the matters of his worship and how ill he takes it when those who are bound by their character and profession to preserve and advance the interests of his glory are false to their trust, and betray them. If God's ministers be vicious and profane, *of how much sorer punishment will they be thought worthy*, here and for ever, than other sinners! Let such read the doom here passed on Eli's house, and tremble. It is threatened,

1. That their power should be broken (*v. 31*): *I will cut off thy arm, and the arm of thy father's house*. They should be stripped of all their authority, should be deposed, and have no influence upon the people as they had had. *God would make them contemptible and base*. See Mal. ii. 8, 9. The sons had abused their power to oppress the people and encroach upon their rights, and the father had not used his power, as he ought to have done, to restrain and punish them, and therefore it was justly threatened that the arm should be cut off which was not stretched out as it should have been.

2. That their lives should be shortened. He was himself an old man; but instead of using the wisdom, gravity, experience, and authority of his age, for the service of God and the support of religion, he had suffered the infirmities of age to make him more cool and remiss in his duty, and therefore it is here threatened that none of his posterity should live to be old, *v. 31, 32*. It is twice spoken: *"There shall not be an old man in thy house for ever;"* and again (*v. 33*), *"All the increase of thy house, from generation to generation, shall die in the flower of their age, when they are in the midst of the years of their service,"* so that though the family should not be extinct, yet it should never be considerable, nor should any member of it come to be eminent in his day. Bishop Patrick relates, out of some of the Jewish writers, that long after this, there being a family in Jerusalem none of which commonly lived above eighteen years, upon search it was found that they descended from the house of Eli, on which this sentence was passed.

3. That all their comforts should be embittered. (1.) The comfort they had in the sanctuary, in its wealth and prosperity: *Thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation*. This was fulfilled in the Philistines' invasions and the mischiefs they did to Israel, by which the country was impoverished (*ch. xiii. 19*), and no doubt the priests' incomes were thereby very much impaired. The captivity of the ark was such an act of hostility committed upon God's habitation as broke Eli's heart. As it is a blessing to a family to see *peace upon Israel* (*Ps. cxxviii. 5, 6*), so the contrary is a sore judgment upon a family, especially a family of priests. (2.) The com-

fort of their children: *"The man of thine whom I shall not cut off by an untimely death shall live to be a blot and burden to the family, a scandal and vexation to his relations; he shall be to consume thy eyes and grieve thy heart, for his foolishness or his sickliness, his wickedness or his poverty."* Grief for a dead child is great, but for a bad child often greater.

4. That their substance should be wasted and they should be reduced to extreme poverty (*v. 36*): *"He that is left alive in thy house shall have little joy of his life, for want of a livelihood; he shall come and crouch to the succeeding family for a subsistence."*

(1.) He shall beg for the smallest alms—a *piece of silver* (and the word signifies the *least piece*) and a *morsel of bread*. See how this answered the sin. Eli's sons must have the best pieces of flesh, but their sons will be glad of a *morsel of bread*. Note, Want is the just punishment of wantonness. Those who could not be content without dainties and varieties are brought, they or theirs, to want necessities, and the Lord is righteous in thus visiting them. (2.) He shall beg for the meanest office: *Put me into somewhat belonging to the priesthood* (as it is in the original); *make me as one of the hired servants*, the fittest place for a prodigal. Plenty and power are forfeited when they are abused. They should not be able to pretend to any good preferment, not to any place at the altar, but should petition for some poor employment, be the work ever so hard and the wages ever so small, so they might but get bread. This, it is probable, was fully accomplished when Abiathar, who was of Eli's race, was deposed by Solomon for treason, and he and his turned out of office in the temple (*1 Kings ii. 26, 27*), by which it is easy to think his posterity were reduced to the extremities here described.

5. That God would shortly begin to execute these judgments in the death of Hophni and Phinehas, the sad tidings of which Eli himself should live to hear: *This shall be a sign to thee, v. 34*. When thou hearest it, say, *"Now the word of God begins to operate; here is one threatening fulfilled, from which I infer that all the rest will be fulfilled in their order."* Hophni and Phinehas had many a time sinned together, and it is here foretold that they should die together both in one day. Bind these tares in a bundle for the fire. This was fulfilled, *ch. iv. 11*.

VI. In the midst of all these threatenings against the house of Eli, here is mercy promised to Israel (*v. 35*): *I will raise me up a faithful priest*. 1. This was fulfilled in Zadoc, of the family of Eleazar, who came into Abiathar's place in the beginning of Solomon's reign, and was faithful to his trust; and the high priests were of his posterity as long as the Levitical priesthood continued. Note, The wickedness of ministers, though it destroy themselves, yet it shall not destroy

the ministry. How bad soever the officers are, the office shall continue always to the end of the world. If some betray their trust, yet others shall be raised up that will be true to it. God's work shall never fall to the ground for want of hands to carry it on. The high priest is here said to *walk before God's anointed* (that is, David and his seed) because he wore the breast-plate of judgment, which he was to consult, not in common cases, but for the king, in the affairs of state. Note, Notwithstanding the degeneracy we see and lament in many families, God will secure to himself a succession. If some grow worse than their ancestors, others, to balance that, shall grow better. 2. It has its full accomplishment in the priesthood of Christ, that merciful and faithful high priest whom God raised up when the Levitical priesthood was thrown off, who in all things did his father's mind, and for whom God will build a sure house, build it on a rock, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

## CHAP. III.

In the foregoing chapter we had Samuel a young priest, though by birth a Levite only, for he ministered before the Lord in a linen ephod; in this chapter we have him a young prophet, which was more, God in an extraordinary manner revealing himself to him, and in him resuming, if not commencing, prophecy in Israel. Here is, I. God's first manifestation of himself in an extraordinary manner to Samuel, ver. 1—10. II. The message he sent by him to Eli, ver. 11—14. III. The faithful delivery of that message to Eli, and his submission to the righteousness of God in it, ver. 15—18. IV. The establishment of Samuel to be a prophet in Israel, ver. 19—21.

**A**ND the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was no open vision.* 2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli *was* laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, *that* he could not see; 3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God *was*, and Samuel was laid down *to sleep*; 4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I. 5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. 6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. 8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And Eli

perceived that the LORD had called the child. 9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

To make way for the account of God's revealing himself first to Samuel, we are here told, 1. How industrious Samuel was in serving God, according as his place and capacity were (c. 1): *The child Samuel*, though but a child, *ministered unto the Lord before Eli*. It was an aggravation of the wickedness of Eli's sons that the child Samuel shamed them. They rebelled against the Lord, but Samuel ministered to him; they slighted their father's admonitions, but Samuel was observant of them; he ministered before Eli, under his eye and direction. It was the praise of Samuel that he was so far from being influenced by their bad example that he did not in the least fall off, but improved and went on. And it was a preparative for the honours God intended him; he that was thus faithful in a little was soon after entrusted with much more. Let those that are young be humble and diligent, which they will find the surest way to preferment. Those are fittest to rule who have learnt to obey. 2. How scarce a thing prophecy then was, which made the call of Samuel to be the greater surprise to himself and the greater favour to Israel: *The word of the Lord was precious in those days*. Now and then a man of God was employed as a messenger upon an extraordinary occasion (as *ch. ii. 27*), but there were no settled prophets, to whom the people might have recourse for counsel, nor from whom they might expect the discoveries of the divine will. And the rarity of prophecy made it the more precious in the account of all those that knew how to put a right value upon it. It was precious, for what there was (it seems) was private: *There was no open vision*, that is, there were none that were publicly known to have visions. Perhaps the impiety and impurity that prevailed in the tabernacle, and no doubt corrupted the whole nation, had provoked God, as a token of his displeasure, to withdraw the Spirit of prophecy, till the decree had gone forth for the raising up of a more faithful priest, and then, as an earnest of that, this faithful prophet was raised up.

The manner of God's revealing himself to Samuel is here related very particularly, for it was uncommon.

I Eli had retired. Samuel had waited on



him to his bed, and the rest that attended the service of the sanctuary had gone, we may suppose, to their several apartments (v. 2): *Eli had laid down in his place*; he went to bed betimes, being unfit for business and soon weary of it, and perhaps loving his ease too well. Probably he kept his chamber much, which gave his sons the greater liberty. And he sought retirement the more because his eyes began to wax dim, an affliction which came justly upon him for winking at his sons' faults.

II. Samuel had laid down to sleep, in some closet near to Eli's room, as his page of the back-stairs, ready within call if the old man should want any thing in the night, perhaps to read to him if he could not sleep. He chose to take Samuel into this office rather than any of his own family, because of the towardsly disposition he observed in him. When his own sons were a grief to him, his little servitor was his joy. Let those that are afflicted in their children thank God if they have any about them in whom they are comforted. *Samuel had laid down ere the lamp of God went out, v. 3.* It should seem he lay somewhere so near the holy place that he went to bed by that light, before any of the lamps in the branches of the candlestick went out (for the main lamp never went out), which probably was towards midnight. Till that time Samuel had been employing himself in some good exercise or other, reading and prayer, or perhaps cleaning or making ready the holy place; and then went softly to his bed. Then we may expect God's gracious visits, when we are constant and diligent in our duty.

III. God called him by name, and he took it for Eli's call, and ran to him v. 4, 5. Samuel lay awake in his bed, his thoughts, no doubt, well employed (as David's, Ps. lxxiii. 6), when the Lord called to him, bishop Patrick thinks out of the most holy place, and so the Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *A voice was heard out of the temple of the Lord*; but Eli, though it is likely he lay nearer, heard it not; yet possibly it might come some other way. Hereupon we have an instance, 1. Of Samuel's industry, and readiness to wait on Eli; supposing it was he that called him, he hastened out of his warm bed and ran to him, to see if he wanted any thing, and perhaps fearing he was not well. "Here am I," said he—a good example to servants, to come when they are called; and to the younger, not only to submit to the elder, but to be careful and tender of them. 2. Of his infirmity, and unacquaintedness with the visions of the Almighty, that he took that to be only Eli's call which was really the call of God. Such mistakes as these we make oftener than we think of. God calls to us by his word, and we take it to be only the call of the minister, and answer it accordingly; he calls to us by his providences, and we look only at the instru-

ments. His voice cries, and it is but here and there a man of wisdom that understands it to be his voice. Eli assured him he did not call him, yet did not chide him for disturbing him with being over-officious, did not call him a fool, and tell him he dreamed but mildly bade him lie down again, he had nothing for him to do. If servants must be ready at their masters' call, masters also must be tender of their servants' comfort: that thy *man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou.* So *Samuel went and lay down.* God calls many by the ministry of the word, and they say, as Samuel did, "Here am I;" but not looking at God, nor discerning his voice in the call, the impressions of it are soon lost; they lie down again, and their convictions come to nothing.

IV. The same call was repeated, and the same mistake made, a second and third time, v. 6—9. 1. God continued to call the child *yet again* (v. 6), and *again the third time*, v. 8. Note, The call which divine grace designs to make effectual shall be repeated till it is so, that is, till we come at the call; for the purpose of God, according to which we are called, shall certainly stand. 2. Samuel was still ignorant that it was the Lord that called him (v. 7): *Samuel did not yet know the Lord.* He knew the written word, and was acquainted with the mind of God in that, but he did not yet apprehend the way in which God reveals himself to his servants the prophets, especially by a *still small voice*; this was altogether new and strange to him. Perhaps he would have been sooner aware of a divine revelation had it come in a dream or a vision; but this was a way he had not only not known himself, but not heard of. Those that have the greatest knowledge of divine things must remember the time when they were as babes, unskilful in the word of righteousness. *When I was a child I understood as a child.* Yet let us not despise the day of small things. *Thus did Samuel* (so the margin reads it) *before he knew the Lord, and before the word of the Lord was revealed unto him*; thus he blundered one time after another, but afterwards he understood his duty better. The witness of the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful is often thus mistaken, by which means they lose the comfort of it; and the strivings of the Spirit with the consciences of sinners are likewise often mistaken, and so the benefit of their convictions is lost. *God speaketh once, yea, twice, but man perceiveth it not,* Job xxxiii. 14. 3. Samuel went to Eli this second and third time, the voice perhaps resembling his, and the child being very near to him; and he tells Eli, with great assurance, "*Thou didst call me* (v. 6—8), it could be no one else." Samuels' disposition to come when he was called, though but by Eli, proving him dutiful and active, qualified him for the favour now to be shown him; God chooses to employ such.

But there was a special providence in it, that he should go thus often to Eli; for hereby, at length, *Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child*, v. 8. And, (1.) This would be a mortification to him, and he would apprehend it to be a step towards his family's being degraded, that when God had something to say he should choose to say it to the child Samuel, his servant that waited on him, and not to him. And it would humble him the more when afterwards he found it was a message to himself, and yet sent to him by a child. He had reason to look upon this as a further token of God's displeasure. (2.) This would put him upon enquiring what it was that God said to Samuel, and would abundantly satisfy him of the truth and certainty of what should be delivered, and no room would be left for him to suggest that it was but a fancy of Samuel's; for before the message was delivered he himself perceived that God was about to speak to him, and yet must not know what it was till he had it from Samuel himself. Thus even the infirmities and mistakes of those whom God employs are overruled by infinite Wisdom, and made serviceable to his purposes.

V. At length Samuel was put into a posture to receive a message from God, not to be lodged with himself and go no further, but, that he might be a complete prophet, to be published and made an open vision. 1. Eli, perceiving that it was the voice of God that Samuel heard, gave him instructions what to say, v. 9. This was honestly done, that though it was a disgrace to him for God's call to pass him by, and be directed to Samuel, yet he put him in the way how to entertain it. Had he been envious of this honour done to Samuel, he would have done what he could to deprive him of it, and, since he did not perceive it himself, would have bidden him lie down and sleep, and never heed it, it was but a dream; but he was of a better spirit than to act so; he gave him the best advice he could, for the forwarding of his advancement. Thus the elder should, without grudging, do their utmost to assist and improve the younger that are rising up, though they see themselves likely to be darkened and eclipsed by them. Let us never be wanting to inform and instruct those that are coming after us, even such as will soon be preferred before us, John i. 30. The instruction Eli gave him was, when God called the next time, to say, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. He must call himself God's servant, must desire to know the mind of God. "*Speak, Lord, speak to me, speak now:*" and he must prepare to hear, and promise to attend: *Thy servant heareth*. Note, Then we may expect that God will speak to us, when we set ourselves to hearken to what he says, Ps. lxxxv. 8; Hab. ii. 1. When we come to read the word of God, and to attend on the preaching of it, we should come thus disposed, submitting ourselves to

the commanding light and power of it: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. 2. It should seem that God spoke the fourth time in a way somewhat different from the other; though the call was, as at other times, a call to him by name, yet now *he stood and called*, which intimates that there was now some visible appearance of the divine glory to Samuel, a vision that stood before him, like that before Eliphaz, though *he could not discern the form thereof*, Job iv. 16. This satisfied him that it was not Eli that called; for he now *saw the voice that spoke with him*, as it is expressed, Rev. i. 12. Now also the call was doubled—*Samuel, Samuel*, as if God delighted in the mention of his name, or to intimate that now he should be made to understand who spoke to him. *God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this*, Ps. lxiii. 11. It was an honour to him that God was pleased to *know him by name* (Exod. xxxiii. 12), and then his call was powerful and effectual when he called him by name, and so brought it particularly to him, as *Saul, Saul*. Thus God called to Abraham by name, Gen. xxii. 1. 3. Samuel said, as he was taught, *Speak, for thy servant heareth*. Note, Good words should be put into children's mouths betimes, and apt expressions of pious and devout affections, by which they may be prepared for a better acquaintance with divine things, and trained up to a holy converse with them. Teach young people what they shall say, for *they cannot order their speech by reason of darkness*. Samuel did not now rise and run as before when he thought Eli called, but lay still and listened. The more sedate and composed our spirits are the better prepared they are for divine discoveries. Let all tumultuous thoughts and passions be kept under, and every thing be quiet and serene in the soul, and then we are fit to hear from God. All must be silent when he speaks. But observe, Samuel left out one word; he did not say, *Speak, Lord*, but only, *Speak, for thy servant heareth*, perhaps, as bishop Patrick suggests, out of uncertainty whether it was God that spoke to him or no. However, by this answer, *Speak, for thy servant heareth*, way was made for the message he was now to receive, and Samuel was brought acquainted with the words of God and visions of the Almighty, and *this ere the lamp of God went out* (v. 3) *in the temple of the Lord*, which some of the Jewish writers put a mystical sense upon; before the fall of Eli, and the eclipsing of the Urim and Thummim for some time thereby, God called Samuel, and made him an oracle, whence they have an observation among their doctors, *That the sun riseth, and the sun goeth down* (Ecl. i. 5), that is, say they, Ere God maketh the sun of one righteous man to set, he makes the sun of another righteous man to rise. *Smith & Kimchi*.

11 And the Lord said to Samuel,

Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. 12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. 13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever. 15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision. 16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. 17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. 18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

Here is, I. The message which, after all this introduction, God delivered to Samuel concerning Eli's house. God did not come to him now to tell him how great a man he should be in his day, what a figure he should make, and what a blessing he should be in Israel. Young people have commonly a great curiosity to be told their fortune, but God came to Samuel, not to gratify his curiosity, but to employ him in his service and send him on an errand to another person, which was much better; and yet the matter of this first message, which no doubt made a very great impression upon him, might be of good use to him afterwards, when his own sons proved, though not so bad as Eli's, yet not so good as they should have been, *ch. viii.* 3. The message is short, not nearly so long as that which the man of God brought, *ch. ii.* 27. For, Samuel being a child, it could not be expected that he should remember a long message, and God considered his frame. The memories of children must not be overcharged, no, not with divine things. But it is a sad message, a message of wrath, to ratify the message in the former chapter, and to bind on the sentence there pronounced, because perhaps Eli did not give so much regard to that as he ought to have done.

Divine threatenings, the less they are heeded, the surer they will come and the heavier they will fall. Reference is here had to what was there said concerning both the sin and the punishment.

1. Concerning the sin: it is the iniquity that he knoweth, *v. 13.* The man of God told him of it, and many a time his own conscience had told him of it. O what a great deal of guilt and corruption is there in us concerning which we may say, "It is the iniquity which our own heart knoweth, we are conscious to ourselves of it!" In short, the iniquity was this: *His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.* Or, as it is in the Hebrew, he frowned not upon them. If he did show his dislike of their wicked courses, yet not to that degree that he ought to have done: he did reprove them, but he did not punish them, for the mischief they did, nor deprive them of their power to do mischief, which as a father, high priest, and judge, he might have done. Note, (1.) Sinners do by their own wickedness make themselves vile. They debauch themselves (for every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lusts, *Jam. i.* 14) and thereby they debase themselves, and make themselves not only mean, but odious to the holy God and holy men and angels. Sin is a vile thing, and degrades men more than any thing, *Ps. xv.* 4. Eli's sons made light of God, and made his offerings vile in the people's eyes; but the shame returned into their own bosom: they made themselves vile. (2.) Those that do not restrain the sins of others, when it is in the power of their hand to do it, make themselves partakers of the guilt, and will be charged as accessaries. Those in authority will have a great deal to answer for if they make not the sword they bear a terror to evil workers.

2. Concerning the punishment: it is that which I have spoken concerning his house, *v. 12 and 13.* I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, that is, that a curse should be entailed upon his family from generation to generation. The particulars of this curse we had before; they are not here repeated, but it is added, (1.) That when that sentence began to be executed it would be very dreadful and amazing to all Israel (*v. 11*): *Both the ears of every one that hears it shall tingle.* Every Israelite would be struck with terror and astonishment to hear of the slaying of Eli's sons, the breaking of Eli's neck, and the dispersion of Eli's family. Lord, how terrible art thou in thy judgments! If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? Note, God's judgments upon others should affect us with a holy fear. *Ps. cxix.* 120. (2.) That these direful first-fruits of the execution would be certain earnest of the progress and full accomplishment of it: *When I begin I will proceed and make an end of all that I have threatened, v. 12.* It is intimated that it might possibly

he some time before he would begin, but let them not call that forbearance an acquittance, nor that reprieve a pardon; for when at length he does begin he will make thorough work of it, and, though he stay long, he will strike home. (3.) That no room should be left for hope that this sentence might be reversed and the execution stayed or mitigated, v. 14. [1.] God would not revoke the sentence, for he backed it with an oath: *I have sworn to the house of Eli*; and God will not go back from what he has sworn either in mercy or judgment. [2.] He would never come to a composition for the forfeiture: "*The iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever. No atonement shall be made for the sin, nor any abatement of the punishment.*" This was the imperfection of the legal sacrifices, that there were iniquities which they did not reach, which they would not purge; *but the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin*, and secures all those that by faith are interested in it from that eternal death which is the wages of sin.

11. The delivery of this message to Eli. Observe,

1. Samuel's modest concealment of it, v. 15. (1.) *He lay till the morning*, and we may well suppose he lay awake pondering on what he had heard, repeating it to himself, and considering what use he must make of it. After we have received the spiritual food of God's word, it is good to compose ourselves, and give it time to digest. (2.) *He opened the doors of the house of the Lord*, in the morning, as he used to do, being up first in the tabernacle. That he should do so at other times was an instance of extraordinary towardliness in a child, but that he should do so this morning was an instance of great humility. God had highly honoured him above all the children of his people, yet he was not proud of the honour, nor pulled up with it, did not think himself too great and too good to be employed in these mean and servile offices, but, as cheerfully as ever, went and opened the doors of the tabernacle. Note, Those to whom God manifests himself he makes and keeps low in their own eyes, and willing to stoop to any thing by which they may be serviceable to his glory, though but as door-keepers in his house. One would have expected that Samuel would be so full of his vision as to forget his ordinary service, that he would go among his companions, as one in an ecstasy, to tell them what converse he had had with God this night; but he modestly keeps it to himself, tells the vision to no man, but silently goes on in his business. Our secret communion with God is not to be proclaimed upon the house-tops. (3.) *He feared to show Eli the vision*. If he was afraid Eli would be angry with him and chide him, then we have cause to suspect that Eli used to be as severe with this towards child as he was indulgent to

his own wicked sons, and this will bear hard upon him. But we will suppose it was rather because he was afraid to grieve and trouble the good old man that he was so shy. If he had run immediately with the tidings to Eli, this would have looked as if he desired the woeful day and hoped to build his own family upon the ruin of Eli's; therefore it became him not to be forward to declare the vision. No good man can take pleasure in bringing evil tidings, especially not Samuel to Eli, the pupil to the tutor whom he loves and honours.

2. Eli's careful enquiry into it, v. 16, 17. As soon as ever he heard Samuel stirring he called for him, probably to his bed-side; and, having before perceived that God had spoken to him, he obliged him, not only by importunity (*I pray thee, hide it not from me*), but, finding him timorous and backward, by an adjuration likewise—*God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me!* He had reason enough to fear that the message prophesied no good concerning him, but evil; and yet, because it was a message from God, he could not contentedly be ignorant of it. A good man desires to be acquainted with all the will of God, whether it make for him or against him. His adjuration—*God do so to thee, if thou hide any thing from me*—may intimate the fearful doom of unfaithful watchmen; if they warn not sinners, they bring upon themselves that wrath and curse which they should have denounced, in God's name, against those that *go on still in their trespasses*.

3. Samuel's faithful delivery of his message at last (v. 18): *He told him every whit*. When he saw that he must tell him he never minced the matter, nor offered to make it better than it was, to blunt that which was sharp, or to gild the bitter pill, but delivered the message as plainly and fully as he received it, *not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God*. Christ's ministers must deal thus faithfully.

4. Eli's pious acquiescence in it. He did not question Samuel's integrity, was not cross with him, nor had he any thing to object against the equity of the sentence. He did not complain of the punishment, as Cain did, that it was greater than he either deserved or could bear, but patiently submitted, and accepted the punishment of his iniquity: *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*. He understood the sentence to intend only a temporal punishment, and the entail of disgrace and poverty upon his posterity, and not a final separation of them from the favour of God, and therefore he cheerfully submitted, did not repine, because he knew the demerits of his family; nor did he now intercede for the reversing of the sentence, because God had ratified it with a solemn oath, of which he would not repent. He therefore composes himself into a humble

resignation to God's will, as Aaron, in a case not much unlike. Lev. x. 3, *He held his peace.* In a few words, (1.) He lays down this satisfying truth, "*It is the Lord* ; it is he that pronounces the judgment, from whose bar there lies no appeal and against whose sentence there lies no exception. It is he that will execute the judgment, whose power cannot be resisted, his justice arraigned, nor his sovereignty contested. *It is the Lord*, who will thus sanctify and glorify himself, and it is highly fit he should. *It is the Lord*, with whom there is no unrighteousness, who never did nor ever will do any wrong to any of his creatures, nor exact more than their iniquity deserves." (2.) He infers from it this satisfying conclusion: "*Let him do what seemeth him good.* I have nothing to say against his proceedings. He is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works, and therefore *his will be done.* *I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.*" Thus we ought to quiet ourselves under God's rebukes, and never to strive with our Maker.

19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Samuel being thus brought acquainted with the visions of God, we have here an account of the further honour done him as a prophet.

1. God did him honour. Having begun to favour him, he carried on and crowned his own work in him: *Samuel grew, for the Lord was with him, v. 19.* All our increase in wisdom and grace is owing to the presence of God with us; this is all in all to our growth. God honoured Samuel, 1. By further manifestations of himself to him. Samuel had faithfully delivered the message he was entrusted with, and therefore God employed him again in his service: *The Lord revealed himself again to Samuel in Shiloh, v. 21.* Note, God will graciously repeat his visits to those that receive them aright. 2. By fulfilling what he spoke by him: *God did let none of his words fall to the ground, v. 19.* Whatever Samuel said, as a prophet, it proved true, and was accomplished in its season. Probably there were some remarkable instances of the truth of Samuel's predictions that happened soon after, which confirmed those that were afterwards to be fulfilled, and gave general satisfaction as to his mission. God will confirm the word of his servants, and perform the counsel of his

messengers (Isa. xlv. 26), and will do what he hath said.

11. Israel did him honour. They all knew and owned that *Samuel was established to be a prophet, v. 20.* 1. He grew famous; all that came up to Shiloh to worship took notice of him, and admired him, and talked of him when they returned home. Early piety will be the greatest honour of young people, and bring them, as much as any thing, and as soon, into reputation. Those that honour God he will honour. 2. He grew useful and very serviceable to his generation. He that began betimes to be good soon came to do good. His established commission from God, and established reputation with the people, gave him a great opportunity of shining as a light in Israel. When old Eli was rejected, young Samuel was established; for God will never leave himself without a witness nor his church without a guide.

## CHAP. IV.

The predictions in the foregoing chapters concerning the ruin of Eli's house here begin to be fulfilled; how long after does not appear, but certainly not long. Such sinners God often makes quick work with. Here is, 1. The disgrace and loss Israel sustained in an encounter with the Philistines, ver. 1, 2. 11. Their foolish project to fortify themselves by bringing the ark of God into their camp upon the shoulders of Hophni and Phinehas (ver. 3, 4), which made them secure (ver. 5) and struck a fear into the Philistines, but such a fear as roused them, ver. 6-9. 111. The fatal consequences of it: Israel was beaten, and the ark taken prisoner, ver. 10, 11. IV. The tidings of this brought to Shiloh, and the sad reception of those tidings. 1. The city was put into confusion, ver. 12, 13. 2. Eli fainted away, fell, and broke his neck, ver. 14-18. 3. Upon hearing what had occurred his daughter-in-law fell in labour, bore a son, but died immediately, ver. 19-22. These were the things which would make the ears of those that heard them to tingle.

AND the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. 2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. 3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 And when the ark of the covenant of the

LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What *meaneth* the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. 7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. 8 Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these *are* the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9 Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

The first words of this paragraph, which relate to Samuel, that *his word came to all Israel*, seem not to have any reference to the following story, as if it was by any direction of his that the Israelites went out against the Philistines. Had they consulted him, though but newly initiated as a prophet, his counsel might have stood them in more stead than the presence of the ark did; but perhaps the princes of Israel despised his youth, and would not have recourse to him as an oracle, and he did not as yet interpose in public affairs; nor do we find any mention of his name henceforward till some years after (*ch. vii. 3*), only *his word came to all Israel*, that is, people from all parts that were piously disposed had recourse to him as a prophet and consulted him. Perhaps it is meant of his prophecy against the house of Eli. This was generally known and talked of, and all that were serious and observing compared the events here related, when they came to pass, with the prophecy, and saw it accomplished in them. Here is,

I. A war entered into with the Philistines, *v. 1*. It was an attempt to throw off the yoke of their oppression, and would have succeeded better if they had first repented and reformed, and so begun their work at the right end. It is computed that this was about the middle of the forty years' dominion that the Philistines had over Israel (*Judg. xiii. 1*) and soon after the death of Samson; so bishop Patrick, who thinks the slaughter he made at his death might encourage this attempt; but Dr. Lightfoot reckons it forty years after Samson's death, for so long Eli judged, *v. 18*.

II. The defeat of Israel in that war, *v. 2*. Israel, who were the aggressors, were smitten, and had 4000 men killed upon the spot. God had promised that one of them should chase a thousand; but now, on the contrary, *Israel is smitten before the Philistines*. Sin, the accursed thing, was in the camp, and gave their enemies all the advantage against them they could wish for.

III. The measures they concerted for another engagement. A council of war was called, and, instead of resolving to fast and pray and amend their lives, so ill taught were they (and no wonder when they had such teachers) that, 1. They quarrelled with God for appearing against them (*v. 3*): *Wherefore has the Lord smitten us?* If they meant this as an enquiry into the cause of God's displeasure, they needed not go far to find that out. It was plain enough; Israel had sinned, though they were not willing to see it and own it. But it rather seems that they expostulate boldly with God about it, are displeased at what God has done, and dispute the matter with him. They own the hand of God in their trouble (so far was right): "It is the Lord that has smitten us;" but, instead of submitting to it, they quarrel with it, and speak as those that are angry at him and his providence, and not aware of any just provocation they have given him: "Wherefore shall we, that are Israelites, be smitten before the Philistines? How absurd and unjust is it!" Note, The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart *frets against the Lord* (*Prov. xix. 3*) and finds fault with him. 2. They imagined that they could oblige him to appear for them the next time by bringing the ark into their camp. The elders of Israel were so ignorant and foolish as to make the proposal (*v. 3*), and the people soon put it in execution, *v. 4*. They sent to Shiloh for the ark, and Eli had not courage enough to detain it, but sent his ungodly sons, Hophni and Phinehas, along with it, at least permitted them to go, though he knew that wherever they went the curse of God went along with them. Now see here, (1.) The profound veneration the people had for the ark. "O send for that, and it will do wonders for us." The ark was, by institution, a visible token of God's presence. God had said that he would dwell *between the cherubim*, which were over the ark and were carried along with it; now they thought that, by paying a great respect to this sacred chest, they should prove themselves to be Israelites indeed, and effectually engage God Almighty to appear in their favour. Note, It is common for those that have estranged themselves from the vitals of religion to discover a great fondness for the rituals and external observances of it, for those that even deny the power of godliness not only to have, but to have in admiration, the form of it. The temple of the Lord is cried up, and the ark

of the Lord stilled with a great deal of seeming zeal by multitudes that have no regard at all for the Lord of the temple and the God of the ark, as if a fiery concern for the name of Christianity would atone for a profane contempt of the thing. And yet indeed they did but make an idol of the ark, and looked upon it to be as much an image of the God of Israel as those idols which the heathen worshipped were of their gods. To worship the true God, and not to worship him as God, is in effect not to worship him at all. (2.) Their egregious folly in thinking that the ark, if they had it in their camp, would certainly *save them out of the hand of their enemies*, and bring victory back to their side. For, [1.] When the ark set forward Moses prayed, *Rise up, Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered*, well knowing that it was not the ark moving with them, but God appearing for them, that must give them success; and here were no proper means used to engage God to favour them with his presence; what good then would the ark do them, the shell without the kernel? [2.] They were so far from having God's leave to remove his ark that he had plainly enough intimated to them in his law that when they were settled in Canaan his ark should be settled in the place that he should choose (Deut. xii. 5, 11), and that they must come to it, not it to them. How then could they expect any advantage by it when they had not a just and legal possession of it, nor any warrant to remove it from its place? Instead of honouring God by what they did, they really affronted him. Nay, [3.] If there had been nothing else to invalidate their expectations from the ark, how could they expect it should bring a blessing when Hophni and Phinehas were the men that carried it? It would have given too much countenance to their villany if the ark had done any kindness to Israel while it was in the hands of those graceless priests.

IV. The great joy there was in the camp of Israel when the ark was brought into it (v. 5): *They shouted, so that the earth rang again*. Now they thought themselves sure of victory, and therefore gave a triumphant shout before the battle, as if the day was without fail their own, intending, by this mighty shout, to animate themselves and their own forces, and to intimidate their adversaries. Note, Carnal people triumph much in the external privileges and performances of religion, and build much upon them, as if these would infallibly save them, and as if the ark, God's throne, in the camp, would bring them to heaven, though the world and the flesh should be upon the throne in the heart.

V. The consternation into which the bringing of the ark into the camp of Israel put the Philistines. The two armies lay so near encamped that the Philistines heard the shout the Israelites gave on this great occasion. They soon understood what it was they tri-

umphed in (v. 6), and were afraid of the consequences. For, 1. It had never been done before in their days: *God has come into their camp*, and therefore *woe unto us* (v. 7), and again, *woe unto us*, v. 8. The name of the God of Israel was formidable even to those that worshipped other gods, and some apprehensions even the infidels had of the danger of contending with them. Natural conscience suggests this, that those are in a woeful condition who have God against them. Yet see what gross notions they had of the divine presence, as if the God of Israel were not as much in the camp before the ark came thither, which may very well be excused in them, since the notions the Israelites themselves had of that presence were no better. "O," say they, "this is a new design upon us, more frightful than all their stratagems, for there has not been such a thing heretofore; this was the most effectual course they could take to dispirit our men and weaken their hands." 2. When it had been done in the days of old, it had wrought wonders: *These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness*, v. 8. Here they were as much out in their history as in their divinity: the plagues of Egypt were inflicted before the ark was made and before Israel came into the wilderness; but some confused traditions they had of wonders wrought by or for Israel when this ark was carried before them, which they attributed, not to Jehovah, but to the ark. Now, say they, *Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods?* taking the ark for God, as well they might when the Israelites themselves idolized it. Yet, it should seem, they scarcely believed themselves when they spoke thus formidably of *these mighty gods*, but only bantered; for instead of retreating, or proposing conditions of peace, which they would have done had they been really convinced of the power of Israel's God, they stirred up one another to fight so much the more stoutly; this surprising difficulty did but sharpen their resolution (v. 9): *Be strong, and quit yourselves like men*. The commanders inspired bold and generous thoughts into the minds of their soldiers when they bade them remember how they had lorded it over Israel, and what an intolerable grief and shame it would be if they flinched now, and suffered Israel to lord it over them.

10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

Here is a short account of the issue of this battle.

I. Israel was smitten, the army dispersed and totally routed, not retiring into the camp, as before (v. 2) when they hoped to rally again, but returning to their tents, every man shifting for his own safety and making the best of his way home, despairing to make head any more; and 30,000 were slain in the field of battle, v. 10. Israel was put to the worse, 1. Though they had the better cause, were the people of God and the Philistines were uncircumcised; they stood up in necessary defence of their just rights and liberties against invaders, and yet they failed of success, for *their rock had sold them*. A good cause often suffers for the sake of the bad men that undertake it. 2. Though they had the greater confidence, and were the more courageous. They shouted, while the Philistines trembled, and yet, when God pleased so to order it, the Philistines' terrors were turned into triumphs, and Israel's shouts into lamentations. 3. Though they had the ark of God with them. External privileges will secure none that abuse them and do not live up to them. The ark in the camp will add nothing to its strength when there is an Achan in it.

II. The ark itself was taken by the Philistines; and Hophni and Phinehas, who it is likely kept close to it, and when it was in danger ventured far in the defence of it, because by it they got their living, were *both slain*, v. 11. To this sad event the Psalmist refers, Ps. lxxviii. 61, 64, *He delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hands. Their priests fell by the sword*. 1. The slaughter of the priests, considering their bad character, was no great loss to Israel, but it was a dreadful judgment upon the house of Eli. The word which God had spoken was fulfilled in it (ch. ii. 34): *This shall be a sign unto thee, an earnest of the judgments threatened, thy two sons shall die both in one day, and so shall all the increase of thy house die in the flower of their age*, v. 33. If Eli had done his duty, and put them, as polluted, from the priesthood (Neh. vii. 64), they might have lived, though in disgrace; but now God takes the work into his own hands, and chases them out of the world by the sword of the uncircumcised. *The Lord is known by those judgments which he executeth*. It is true the sword devours one as well as another, but these were waited for of the sword, marked for vengeance. They were out of their place; what had they to do in the camp? When men leave the way of their duty they shut themselves out of God's protection. But this was not all; they had betrayed the ark, by bringing it into danger, without a warrant from God, and this filled the measure of their iniquities. But, 2. The taking of the ark was a very great judgment upon Israel, and a certain token of God's hot displeasure against them. Now they are made to see their folly in trusting to their external privi-

leges when they had by their wickedness forfeited them, and fancying that the ark would save them when God had departed from them. Now they are made to reflect, with the utmost regret, upon their own rashness and presumption in bringing the ark into the camp and so exposing it, and wish a thousand times they had left it where God had fixed it. Now they are convinced that God will not be prescribed to by vain and foolish men, and that though he has bound us to his ark he has not bound himself to it, but will rather deliver it into the hands of his sworn enemies than suffer it to be profaned by his false friends, and countenance their superstition. Let none think to shelter themselves from the wrath of God under the cloak of a visible profession, for there will be those cast into outer darkness that have *eaten and drunk in Christ's presence*.

12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. 13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. 14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. 15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. 18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark or God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Tidings are here brought to Shiloh of the fatal issue of their battle with the Philistines. Bad news flies fast. This soon spread through all Israel; every man that fled to his tent brought it, with too plain a proof of it, to his neighbours. But no place was so



nearly concerned as Shiloh. Thither therefore an express posted away immediately; it was a man of Benjamin; the Jews fancy it was Saul. *He rent his clothes, and put earth upon his head*, by these signs to proclaim the sorrowful news to all that saw him as he ran, and to show how much he himself was affected with it, v. 12. He went straight to Shiloh with it; and here we are told,

I. How the city received it. *Eli sat in the gate* (v. 13, 18), but the messenger was loth to tell him first, and therefore passed him by, and told it in the city, with all the aggravating circumstances; and now *both the ears of every one that heard it tingled*, as was foretold, ch. iii. 11. Their hearts trembled, and every face gathered blackness. *All the city cried out* (v. 13), and well they might, for, besides that this was a calamity to all Israel, it was a particular loss to Shiloh, and the ruin of that place; for, though the ark was soon rescued out of the hands of the Philistines, yet it never returned to Shiloh again; their candlestick was removed out of its place, because they had *left their first love*, and their city dwindled, and sunk, and came to nothing. Now *God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh*, they having driven him from them; and the tribe of Ephraim, which had for 340 years been blessed with the presence of the ark in it, lost the honour (Ps. lxxviii. 60, 67), and, some time after, it was transferred to the tribe of Judah, the *Mount Zion which he loved*, as it follows there (v. 68), because the men of Shiloh knew not *the day of their visitation*. This abandoning of Shiloh Jerusalem is long afterwards reminded of, and told to take warning by. Jer. vii. 12, "Go see what I did to Shiloh. From this day, this fatal day, let the desolations of Shiloh be dated." They had therefore reason enough to cry out when they heard that the ark was taken.

II. What a fatal blow it was to old Eli. Let us see, 1. With what fear he expected the tidings. Though old, and blind, and heavy, yet he could not keep his chamber when he was sensible the glory of Israel lay at stake, but placed himself by the way-side, to receive the first intelligence; for *his heart trembled for the ark of God*, v. 13. His careful thoughts represented to him what a dishonour it would be to God, and what an irreparable loss to Israel, if the ark should fall into the Philistines' hands, with what profane triumphs the tidings would be told in Gath and published in the streets of Ashkelon. He also apprehended what imminent danger there was of it. Israel had forfeited the ark (his own sons especially) and the Philistines would aim at it; and now the threatening comes to his mind, that he should *see an enemy in God's habitation* (ch. ii. 32); and perhaps his own heart reproached him for not using his authority to prevent the carrying of the ark into the camp. All these things made him tremble. Note, All good

men lay the interests of God's church nearer their hearts than any secular interest or concern of their own, and cannot but be in pain and fear for them if at any time they are in peril. How can we be easy if the ark be not safe? 2. With what grief he received the tidings. Though he could not see, he could hear the *tumult and crying of the city*, and perceived it to be the voice of lamentation, and mourning, and woe; like a careful magistrate, he asks, *What means the noise of this tumult?* v. 14. He is told there is an express come from the army, who relates the story to him very distinctly, and with great confidence, having himself been an eye-witness of it, v. 16, 17. The account of the defeat of the army, and the slaughter of a great number of the soldiers, was very grievous to him as a judge; the tidings of the death of his two sons, of whom he had been so indulgent, and who, he had reason to fear, died impenitent, touched him in a tender part as a father; yet it was not for these that his heart trembled: there is a greater concern upon his spirit, which swallows up the less; he does not interrupt the narrative with any passionate lamentations for his sons, like David for Absalom, but waits for the end of the story, not doubting but that the messenger, being an Israelite, would, without being asked, say something of the ark; and if he could but have said, "Yet the ark of God is safe, and we are bringing that home," his joy for that would have overcome his grief for all the other disasters, and have made him easy; but, when the messenger concludes his story with, *The ark of God is taken*, he is struck to the heart, his spirits fail, and, it should seem, he swooned away, fell off his seat, and partly with the fainting, and partly with the fall, he died immediately, and never spoke a word more. His heart was broken first, and then his neck. So fell the high priest and judge of Israel, so fell his heavy head when he had lived within two of 100 years, so fell the crown from his head when he had judged Israel about forty years: thus did his sun set under a cloud, thus were the folly and wickedness of those sons of his, whom he had indulged, his ruin at last. Thus does God sometimes set marks of his displeasure in this life upon good men who have misconducted themselves, that others may hear, and fear, and take warning. A man may die miserably and yet not die eternally, may come to an untimely end and yet the end be peace. Dr. Lightfoot observes that Eli died the death of an unredeemed ass, whose neck was to be broken, Exod. xiii. 13. Yet we must observe, to Eli's praise, that it was the loss of the ark that was his death, not the slaughter of his sons. He does, in effect, say, "Let me fall with the ark, for what pious Israelite can live with any comfort when God's ordinances are removed?" Farewell all in this world, even life itself, if the ark be gone.

19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, *near* to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. 20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. 21 And she named the child *I-chabod*, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. 22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

We have here another melancholy story, that carries on the desolations of Eli's house, and the sorrowful feeling which the tidings of the ark's captivity excited. It is concerning the wife of Phinehas, one of those ungracious sons of Eli that had brought all this mischief on Israel. It cost her her life, though young, as well as that of her father-in-law, that was old; for many a green head, as well as many a hoary head, has been brought by sorrow to the grave: it worketh death. By what is here related of her it appears,

I. That she was a woman of a very tender spirit. Providence so ordered it that, just at this time, she was near her time; and our Saviour hath said, *Woe to those that are with child, or give suck*, in such days as these, Matt. xxiv. 19. So little joy will there then be in the birth, even of a man-child, that it will be said, *Blessed are the wombs that bear not*, Luke xxiii. 29. The amazing news coming at this unhappy juncture, it put her into labour, as great frights or other strong passions sometimes do. When she heard of the death of her father-in-law whom she revered, and her husband whom, bad as he was, she loved, but especially of the loss of the ark, *she travailed, for her pains came thickly upon her* (v. 19), and the tidings so seized her spirits, at a time when they needed all possible supports, that, though she had strength to hear the child, she, soon after, fainted and died away, being very willing to let life go when she had lost the greatest comforts of her life. Those who are drawing near to that trying hour have need to treasure up for themselves comforts from the covenant of grace, to balance, not only the usual sorrows, but any thing extraordinary that may add to the grief which they do not foresee. Faith, at such a time, will keep from fainting, Ps. xxvii. 13.

II That she was a woman of a very gra-

rious spirit, though matched to a wicked husband. Her concern for the death of her husband and father-in-law was an evidence of her natural affection; but her much greater concern for the loss of the ark was an evidence of her pious and devout affection to God and sacred things. The former helped to hasten her travail, but it appears by her dying words that the latter lay nearer her heart (v. 22): *She said, The glory has departed from Israel*, not lamenting so much the sinking of that particular family to which she was related as the general calamity of Israel in the captivity of the ark. This, this was it that was her grief, that was her death.

1. This made her regardless of her child. The women that attended her, who it is likely were some of the first rank in the city, encouraged her, and, thinking that her concern was mostly about the issue of her pains, when the child was born, *said unto her, Fear not*, now the worst is past, *for thou hast borne a son* (and perhaps it was her first-born), *but she answered not, neither did she regard it*. The sorrows of her travail, if she had no other, would have been *forgotten, for joy that a man-child was born into the world*. John xvi. 21. But what is that joy, (1.) To one that feels herself dying? No joy but that which is spiritual and divine will stand us in any stead then. Death is too serious a thing to admit the relish of any earthly joy; it is all flat and sapless then. (2.) What is it to one that is lamenting the loss of the ark? Small comfort could she have of a child born in Israel, in Shiloh, when the ark is lost, and is a prisoner in the land of the Philistines. What pleasure can we take in our creature-comforts and enjoyments if we want God's word and ordinances, especially if we want the comfort of his gracious presence and the light of his countenance? *As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to such heavy hearts*.

2. This made her give her child a name which should perpetuate the remembrance of the calamity and her sense of it. She has nothing to say to the child, only it being her province, now that her husband was dead, to name the child, she orders them to call it *I-chabod*, that is, *Where is the glory?* Or, *Alas for the glory!* or, *There is no glory* (v. 21), which she thus explains with her dying lips (v. 22): "*The glory has departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken*. Call the child inglorious, for so he is; the beauty of Israel is lost, and there appears no hope of ever retrieving it: never let the name of an Israelite, much less a priest, carry glory in it any more, now that the ark is taken." Note, (1.) The purity and plenty of God's ordinances, and the tokens of his presence in them, are the glory of any people, much more so than their wealth, and trade, and interest, among the nations 2. Nothing is more cutting, more killing, to

a faithful Israelite, than the want and loss of these. If God go, the glory goes, and all good goes. Woe unto us if he depart!

## CHAP. V.

It is now time to enquire what has become of the ark of God; we cannot but think that we shall hear more of that sacred treasure. I should have thought the next news would have been that all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, had gathered together as one man, with a resolution to bring it back, or die in the attempt; but we find not any motion made of that kind, so little was there of zeal or courage left among them. Nay, we do not find that they desired a treaty with the Philistines about the ransom of it, or offered any thing in lieu of it. "It is gone, and let it go." Many have softness enough to lament the loss of the ark that have not hardness enough to take one step towards the recovery of it, any more than Israel here. If the ark will help itself it may, for they will not help it. Unworthy they were of the name of Israelites that could thus tamely part with the glory of Israel. God would therefore take the work into his own hands and plead his own cause, since men would not appear for him. We are told in this chapter, I. How the Philistines triumphed over the ark (ver. 1, 2), and, II. How the ark triumphed over the Philistines, I. Over Dagon their god, ver. 2-5. 2. Over the Philistines themselves, who were sorely plagued with emerods, and made weary of the ark; the men of Ashdod first (ver. 6, 7), then the men of Gath (ver. 8, 9), and lastly those of Ekron, which forced them at length upon a resolution to send the ark back to the land of Israel; for when God judgeth he will overcome.

**A**ND the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod. 2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. 3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. 4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

Here is, I. The Philistines' triumph over the ark, which they were the more pleased, the more proud, to be now masters of, because before the battle they were possessed with a great fear of it, *ch. iv. 7*. When they had it in their hands God restrained them, that they did not offer any violence to it, did not break it to pieces, as the Israelites were ordered to do by the idols of the heathen, but showed some respect to it, and carefully carried it to a place of safety. Whether their curiosity led them to open it, and to read what was written with the finger of God on the two tables of stone that were in it, we are not told; perhaps they looked no further than the golden outside and the cherubim that covered it, like children that are more affected with the fine binding of their bibles than with the precious matter contained

in them. They carried it to Ashdod, one of their five cities, and that in which Dagon's temple was; there they placed the ark of God, *by Dagon* (v. 2), either, 1. As a sacred thing, which they designed to pay some religious respect to, in conjunction with Dagon; for the gods of the heathen were never looked upon as averse to partners. Though the nations would not change their gods, yet they would multiply them and add to them. But they were mistaken in the God of Israel when, in putting his ark by Dagon's image, they intended to do him honour; for he is not worshipped at all if he is not worshipped alone. *The Lord our God is one Lord*. Or rather, 2. They placed it there as a trophy of victory, in honour of Dagon their god, to whom no doubt they intended to offer a great sacrifice, as they had done when they had taken Samson (*Judg. xvi. 23, 24*), boasting that as then they had triumphed over Israel's champion so now over Israel's God. What a reproach was this to God's great name! what a *disgrace to the throne of his glory!* Shall the ark, the symbol of God's presence, be a prisoner to Dagon, a dunghill deity? (1.) So it is, because God will show of how little account the ark of the covenant is if the covenant itself be broken and neglected; even sacred signs are not things that either he is tied to or we can trust to. (2.) So it is for a time, that God may have so much the more glory, in reckoning with those that thus affront him, and get him honour upon them. Having punished Israel, that betrayed the ark, by giving it into the hands of the Philistines, he will next deal with those that abused it, and will fetch it out of their hands again. Thus even the *wrath of man shall praise him*; and he is bringing about his own glory even when he seems to neglect it, *Ps. lxxvi. 10*. Out of the eater shall come forth meat.

II. The ark's triumph over Dagon. Once and again Dagon was made to fall before it. If they designed to do honour to the ark, God thereby showed that he valued not their honour, nor would he accept it; for he will be worshipped, not *with* any god, but *above* all gods. *He owes a shame* (as bishop Hall expresses it) *to those who will be making matches betwixt himself and Belial*. But they really designed to affront it, and though for some hours Dagon stood by the ark, and it is likely stood above it (the ark as its foot-stool), yet the next morning, when the worshippers of Dagon came to pay their devotions to his shrine, they found their triumphing short, *Job xx. 5*.

1. Dagon, that is, the image (for that was all the god), had *fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark, v. 3*. God had seemed to forget the ark, but see how the Psalmist speaks of his appearing, at last, to vindicate his own honour. When he had delivered his strength into captivity, and all seemed go-

ing to ruin, *then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine*, Ps. lxxviii. 59—65. And therefore he prevented the utter desolations of the Jewish church, because he *feared the wrath of the enemy*, Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. Great care was taken, in setting up the images of their gods, to fix them. The prophet takes notice of it, Isa. xli. 7, *He fastened it with nails that it should not be moved*; and again, Isa. xli. 7. And yet Dagon's fastenings stood him in no stead. The ark of God triumphs over him upon his own dunghill, in his own temple. Down he comes before the ark, directly towards it (though the ark was set on one side of him), as it were, pointing to the conqueror, to whom he is constrained to yield and do homage. Note, The kingdom of Satan will certainly fall before the kingdom of Christ, error before truth, profaneness before godliness, and corruption before grace in the hearts of the faithful. When the interests of religion seem to be run down and ready to sink, yet even then we may be confident that the day of their triumph will come. Great is the truth, and will prevail. Dagon by falling prostrate before the ark of God, which was a posture of adoration, did as it were direct his worshippers to pay their homage to the God of Israel, as *greater than all gods*. See Exod. xviii. 11.

2. The priests, finding their idol on the floor, make all the haste they can, before it be known, to set him in his place again. A sorry silly thing it was to make a god of, which, when it was down, wanted help to get up again; and sottish wretches those were that could pray for help from that idol that needed, and in effect implored, their help. How could they attribute their victory to the power of Dagon when Dagon himself could not keep his own ground before the ark? But they are resolved Dagon shall be their god still, and therefore set him in his place. Bishop Hall observes hence, It is just with God that those who want grace shall want wit too; and it is the work of superstition to turn men into the stocks and stones they worship. *Those that make them are like unto them*. What is it that the great upholders of the antichristian kingdom are doing at this day but heaving Dagon up, and labouring to set him in his place again, and healing the deadly wound that has been given to the beast? but if the reformation be the cause of God, before which it has begun to fall, it shall not prevail, but shall surely fall before it.

3. The next night Dagon fell the second time, v. 4. They rose early, either, as usual, to make their addresses to their god, or earlier than usual, being impatient to know whether Dagon had kept his standing this night; and, to their great confusion, they find his case worse now than before. Whether the matter of which the image was made was apt

to break or no, so it was that the head and hands were *cut off upon the threshold*, so that nothing remained but the stump, or, as the margin reads it, *the fishy part of Dagon*; for (as many learned men conjecture) the upper part of this image was in a human shape, the lower in the shape of a fish, as mermaids are painted. Such strong delusions were idolaters given up to, so vain were they in their imaginations, and so wretchedly darkened were their foolish hearts, as to worship the images, not only of creatures, but of nonentities, the mere figments of fancy. Well, the misshapen monster is by this fall made to appear, (1.) Very ridiculous, and worthy to be despised. A pretty figure Dagon made now, when the fall had anatomized him, and shown how the human part and the fishy part were artificially put together, which perhaps the ignorant devotees had been made to believe was done by miracle! (2.) Very impotent, and unworthy to be prayed to or trusted in; for his losing his head and hands proved him utterly destitute both of wisdom and power, and for ever disabled either to advise or act for his worshippers. This they got by setting Dagon in his place again; they had better have let him alone when he was down. But those can speed no better that contend with God, and will set up that which he is throwing down, Mal. i. 4. God, by this, magnified his ark and made it honourable, when they vilified and made it contemptible. He also showed what will be the end of all that which is set up in opposition to him. *Gird yourselves, but you shall be broken to pieces*, Isa. viii. 9.

4. The threshold of Dagon's temple was ever looked upon as sacred, and not to be trodden on, v. 5. Some think that reference is had to this superstitious usage of Dagon's worshippers in Zeph. i. 9, where God threatens to punish those who, in imitation of them, leaped over the threshold. One would have thought that this incontestable proof of the ark's victory over Dagon would convince the Philistines of their folly in worshipping such a senseless thing, and that henceforward they would pay their homage to the conqueror; but, instead of being reformed, they were hardened in their idolatry, and, as evil men and seducers are wont to do, became worse and worse, 2 Tim. iii. 13. Instead of despising Dagon, for the threshold's sake that beheaded him, they were almost ready to worship the threshold because it was the block on which he was beheaded, and will never set their feet on that on which Dagon lost his head, shaming those who *tread under foot the blood of the covenant* and trample on things truly sacred. Yet this piece of superstition would help to perpetuate the remembrance of Dagon's disgrace; for, with the custom, the reason would be transmitted to posterity, and the children that should be born, enquiring why the threshold of Dagon's temple must not

be trodden on, would be told that Dagon fell before the ark of the Lord. Thus God would have honour even out of their superstition. We are not told that they repaired the broken image; it is probable that they sent the ark of God away first, and then they patched it up again, and set it in its place; for, it seems, they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, *Is there not a lie in our right hand?* Isa. xlv. 20.

6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, *even* Ashdod and the coasts thereof. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that *it was so*, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god. 8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about *thither*. 9 And it was *so*, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. 10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people. 11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The downfall of Dagon (if the people had made a good use of it, and had been brought by it to repent of their idolatries and to humble themselves before the God of Israel and seek his face) might have prevented the vengeance which God here proceeds to take

upon them for the indignities done to his ark, and their obstinate adherence to their idol, in defiance of the plainest conviction. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see*, Isa. xxvi. 11. And, if they will not see the glory, they shall feel the weight, of God's hand, for so the Philistines did. *The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them* (v. 6), and he not only convinced them of their folly, but severely chastised their insolence. 1. *He destroyed them*, that is, cut many of them off by sudden death, those, we may suppose, that had most triumphed in the captivity of the ark. This is distinguished from the disease with which others were smitten. At Gath it is called a *great destruction* (v. 9), a *deadly destruction*, v. 11. And it is expressly said (v. 12) that those who were *smitten with the emerods were the men that died not* by the other *destruction*, which probably was the pestilence. They boasted of the great slaughter which their sword had made among the Israelites, ch. iv. 10. But God lets them know that though he does not see fit to draw Israel's sword against them (they were unworthy to be employed), yet God had a sword of his own, with which he could make a no less dreadful execution among them, which if he whet, and *his hand take hold on judgment, he will render vengeance to his enemies*, Deut. xxxii. 41, 42. Note, Those that contend with God, his ark, and his Israel, will infallibly be ruined at last. If conviction conquer not, destruction shall. 2. Those that were not destroyed *he smote with emerods* (v. 6), *in their secret parts* (v. 9), so grievous that (v. 12) *the cry went up to heaven*, that is, it might be heard a great way off, and perhaps, in the extremity of their pain and misery, they cried, not to Dagon, but to the God of heaven. The Psalmist, speaking of this sore judgment upon the Philistines, describes it thus: *God smote his enemies in the hinder parts, and put them to a perpetual reproach*, Ps. lxxviii. 66. The emerods (which we call the piles, and perhaps it was then a more grievous disease than it is now) is threatened among the judgments that would be the fruit of the curse, Deut. xxviii. 27. It was both a painful and shameful disease; a vile disease for vile deserts. By it God would humble their pride, and put contempt upon them, as they had done upon his ark. The disease was epidemical, and perhaps, among them, a new disease. *Ashdod was smitten, and the coasts thereof*, the country round. For contempt of God's ordinances, *many are weak and sick, and many sleep*, 1 Cor. xi. 30. 3. The men of Ashdod were soon aware that it was *the hand of God, the God of Israel*, v. 7. Thus they were constrained to acknowledge his power and dominion, and confess themselves within his jurisdiction, and yet they would not renounce Dagon and submit to Jehovah; but rather, now that he touched their bone and their

flesh, and in a tender part, they were ready to curse him to his face, and instead of making their peace with him, and courting the stay of his ark upon better terms, they desired to get clear of it, as the Gadarenes, who, when they had lost their swine, desired Christ to *depart out of their coasts*. Carnal hearts, when they smart under the judgments of God, would rather, if it were possible, put him far from them than enter into covenant and communion with him, and make him their friend. Thus the men of Ashdod resolve, *The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us*. 4. It is resolved to change the place of its imprisonment. A great council was called, and the question proposed to all the lords was, "What shall we do with the ark?" And at last it was agreed that it should be carried to Gath, v. 8. Some superstitious conceit they had that the fault was in the place, and that the ark would be better pleased with another lodging, further off from Dagon's temple; and therefore, instead of returning it, as they should have done, to its own place, they contrive to send it to another place. Gath is pitched upon, a place famed for a race of giants, but their strength and stature are no fence against the pestilence and the emeralds: the men of that city were smitten, *both great and small* (v. 9), both dwarfs and giants, all alike to God's judgments; none so great as to over-top them, none so small as to be over-looked by them. 5. They were all at last weary of the ark, and very willing to get rid of it. It was sent from Gath to Ekron, and, coming by order of council, the Ekronites could not refuse it, but were much exasperated against their great men for sending them such a fatal present (v. 10): *They have sent it to us to slay us and our people*. The ark had the tables of the law in it; and nothing more welcome to faithful Israelites than the word of God (to them it is a *savour of life unto life*), but to uncircumcised Philistines, that persist in enmity to God, nothing more dreadful nor unwelcome: to them it is a *savour of death unto death*. A general assembly is instantly called, to advise about *sending the ark again to its place*, v. 11. While they are consulting about it, the hand of God is doing execution; and their contrivances to evade the judgment do but spread it. Many drop down dead among them. Many more are raging ill of the emeralds, v. 12. What shall they do? Their triumphs in the captivity of the ark are soon turned into lamentations, and they are as eager to quit it as ever they had been to seize it. Note, God can easily make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all that heave at it, Zech. xii. 3. Those that fight against God will soon have enough of it, and, first or last, will be made to know that none ever hardened their hearts against him and prospered. The wealth that is got by fraud and injustice, especially that which is got by

sacrilege and robbing God, though swallowed greedily, and rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, must be vomited up again; for, till it be, the sinner shall not *feel quietness in his belly*, Job xx. 15—20.

## CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have the return of the ark to the land of Israel, whither we are now gladly to attend it, and observe, 1. How the Philistines dismissed it, by the advice of their priests (ver. 1—11), with rich presents to the God of Israel, to make an atonement for their sin (ver. 3—6), and yet with a project to bring it back, unless Providence directed the king, contrary to their inclination, to go to the land of Israel, ver. 8, 9. 11. How the Israelites entertained it. 1. With great joy and sacrifices of praise, ver. 12—18. 2. With an over-bold curiosity to look into it, for which many of them were struck dead, the terror of which moved them to send it forward to another city, ver. 19—21.

AND the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place. 3 And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. 4 Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emeralds, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. 5 Wherefore ye shall make images of your emeralds, and images of your mice that mar the land: and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land. 6 Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed? 7 Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: 8 And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. 9 And see, if it goeth up by the way

of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, *then* he hath done us this great evil; but if not, then we shall know that *it* is not his hand *that* smote us; it was a chance *that* happened to us.

The first words of the chapter tell us how long the captivity of the ark continued—it was *in the country of the Philistines seven months*. *In the field of the Philistines* (so it is in the original), from which some gather that, having tried it in all their cities, and found it a plague to the inhabitants of each, at length they sent it into the open fields, upon which mice sprang up out of the ground in great multitudes, and destroyed the corn which was now nearly ripe and marred the land. With that judgment they were plagued (v. 5), and yet it is not mentioned in the foregoing chapter; so God let them know that wherever they carried the ark, so long as they carried it captive, they should find it a curse to them. *Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed in the field*, Deut. xxviii. 16. But most take it to signify, as we render it, *The country of the Philistines*. Now, 1. Seven months Israel was punished with the absence of the ark, that special token of God's presence. How bare did the tabernacle look without it! How was the holy city now a desolation, and the holy land a wilderness! A melancholy time no doubt it was to the good people among them, particularly to Samuel; but they had this to comfort themselves with, as we have in the like distress when we are deprived of the comfort of public ordinances, that, wherever the ark is, *the Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven*, and by faith and prayer we may have access with boldness to him there. We may have God nigh unto us when the ark is at a distance. 2. Seven months the Philistines were punished with the presence of the ark; so long it was a plague to them, because they would not send it home sooner. Note, Sinners lengthen out their own miseries by obstinately refusing to part with their sins. Egypt's plagues would have been fewer than ten if Pharaoh's heart had not been hardened not to let the people go. But at length it is determined that the ark must be sent back; there is no remedy, they are undone if they detain it.

1. The priests and the diviners are consulted about it, v. 2. They were supposed to be best acquainted both with the rules of wisdom and with the rites of worship and atonement. And the Israelites being their neighbours, and famed above all people for the institutions of their religion, they had no doubt the curiosity to acquaint themselves with their laws and usages; and therefore it was proper to ask them, *What shall we do to the ark of Jehovah?* All nations have had a regard to their priests, as the men whose

lips keep knowledge. Had the Philistines diviners? We have divines, of whom we should enquire wherewith we shall *come before the Lord* and bow ourselves before the most high God.

11. They give their advice very fully, and seem to be very unanimous in it. It was a wonder they did not, as friends to their country, give it, *ex officio*—officially, before they were asked. 1. They urge it upon them that it was absolutely necessary to send the ark back, from the example of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, v. 6. Some, it may be, were loth to yield, and were willing to try it out with the ark awhile longer, and to them they apply themselves: *Wherefore do you harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did?* It seems they were well acquainted with the Mosaic history, and could cite precedents out of it. This good use we should make of the remaining records of God's judgments upon obstinate sinners, we should by them be warned not to harden our hearts as they did. It is much cheaper to learn by other people's experience than by our own. The Egyptians were forced at last to let Israel go; therefore let the Philistines yield in time to let the ark go. 2. They advise that, when they sent it back, they should send a trespass-offering with it, v. 3. Whatever the gods of other nations were, they knew the God of Israel was a jealous God, and how strict he was in his demands of sin-offerings and trespass-offerings from his own people; and therefore, since they found how highly he resented the affront of holding his ark captive, those with whom he had such a quarrel must *in any wise return him a trespass-offering*, and they could not expect to be healed upon any other terms. Injured justice demands satisfaction. So far natural light instructed men. But when they began to contrive what that satisfaction should be, they became wretchedly vain in their imaginations. But those who by wilful sin have imprisoned the truth in unrighteousness, as the Philistines did the ark (Rom. i. 18), may conclude that there is no making their peace with him whom they have thus injured but by a sin-offering; and we know but one that can take away sin. 3. They direct that this trespass-offering should be an acknowledgment of the punishment of their iniquity, by which they might take shame to themselves as conquered and yielding, and guilty before God, and might *give glory to the God of Israel* as their mighty conqueror and most just avenger, v. 5. They must make images of the *emeralds*, that is, of the swellings and sores with which they had been afflicted, so making the reproach of that shameful disease perpetual by their own act and deed (Ps. lxxviii. 66), also images of the *mice that had marred the land*, owning thereby the almighty power of the God of Israel, who could chastise and humble them, even in the day of their tri-

umph, by such small and despicable animals. These images must be made of gold, the most precious metal, to intimate that they would gladly purchase their peace with the God of Israel at any rate, and would not think it bought too dearly with gold, *with much fine gold*. The golden emerods must be, in number, five, according to the number of the lords, who, it is likely, were all afflicted with them, and were content thus to own it; it was advised that the golden mice should be five too, but, because the whole country was infested with them, it should seem, upon second thoughts, they sent more of them, according to the number both of the fenced cities and of the country villages, v. 18. Their priests reminded them that one plague was on them all; they could not blame one another, for they were all guilty, which they were plainly told by being all plagued. Their proposal to offer a trespass-offering for their offence was conformable enough to divine revelation at that time; but to send such things as these for trespass-offerings was very foreign, and showed them grossly ignorant of the methods of reconciliation appointed by the law of Moses; for there it appears all along that it is blood, and not gold, that makes atonement for the soul. 4. They encourage them to hope that hereby they would take an effectual course to get rid of the plague: *You shall be healed*, v. 3. For, it seems, the disease obstinately resisted all the methods of cure their physicians had prescribed. "Let them therefore send back the ark, and then," say they, "*It shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you*, that is, by this it will appear whether it is for your detaining the ark that you are thus plagued; for, if it be, upon your delivering it up the plague will cease." God has sometimes put his people upon making such a trial, whether their reformation would not be their relief. *Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts*, Mal. iii. 10; Hag. ii. 18, 19. Yet they speak doubtfully (v. 5): *Peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you*; as if now they began to think that the judgment might come from God's hand, and yet not be removed immediately upon the restitution of the ark; however that was the likeliest way to obtain mercy. Take away the cause and the effect will cease. 5. Yet they put them in a way to make a further trial whether it was the hand of the God of Israel that had smitten them with these plagues or no. They must, in honour of the ark, put it on a new cart or carriage, to be drawn by two milch-cows, that had calves daily sucking them (v. 7), unused to draw, and inclined to home, both for the sake of the crib where they were fed and of the calves they nourished, and, besides, altogether unacquainted with the road that led towards the land of Israel. They must have no one to lead or drive them, but must take their own way, which, in all reason, one

might expect, would be home again; and yet, unless the God of Israel, after all the other miracles he has wrought, will work one more, and by an invisible power lead these cows, contrary to their natural instinct and inclination, to the land of Israel, and particularly to Beth-shemesh, they will retract their former opinion, and will believe it was not the hand of God that smote them, but it was a chance that *happened to them*, v. 8, 9. Thus did God suffer himself to be tempted and prescribed to, after he had been otherwise affronted, by these uncircumcised Philistines. Would they have been content that the honour of Dagon, their god, should be put upon such an issue as this? See how willing bad men are to shift off their convictions of the hand of God upon them, and to believe, when they are in trouble, that it is a chance that happens to them; and, if so, the rod has no voice which they are concerned to hear or heed.

10 And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: 11 And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. 12 And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the high-way, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh. 13 And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. 14 And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD. 15 And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD. 16 And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day. 17 And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ash-



kelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; 18 And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Beth-shemite.

We are here told,

I. How the Philistines dismissed the ark, v. 10, 11. They were made as glad to part with it as ever they had been to take it. As God had fetched Israel out of the house of bondage, so now he fetched the ark out of its captivity, in such a manner as that *Egypt was glad when they departed*, Ps. cv. 38. 1. They received no money or price for the ransom of it, as they hoped to do, even beyond a king's ransom. Thus it is prophesied of Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 13), *He shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward*. Nay, 2. They gave jewels of gold, as the Egyptians did to the Israelites, to be rid of it. Thus the ark that was carried into the land of the Philistines, a trophy of their victory, carried back with it trophies of its own, and lasting monuments of the disgrace of the Philistines. Note, God will be no loser in his glory, at last, by the successes of the church's enemies against his ark, but will get himself honour from those that seek to do dishonour to him.

II. How the kine brought it to the land of Israel, v. 12. They took the straight way to Beth-shemesh, the next city of the land of Israel, and a priests' city, and turned not aside. This was a wonderful instance of the power of God over the brute-creatures, and, all things considered, no less than a miracle, that cattle unaccustomed to the yoke should draw so even, so orderly, and still go forward,—that, without any driver, they should go from home, to which all tame creatures have a natural inclination, and from their own calves, to which they had a natural affection,—that, without any director, they should go the straight road to Beth-shemesh, a city eight or ten miles off, never miss the way, never turn aside into the fields to feed themselves, nor turn back home to feed their calves. They went on loving for their young ones, by which it appeared that they had not forgotten them, but that nature was sensible of the grievance of going from them; the power of the God of nature therefore appeared so much the greater, in overruling one of the strongest instincts of nature. These two kine, says Dr. Lightfoot, knew their owner, their great owner (Isa. i. 3), whom Hophni and Phinehas knew not, to which I may add they brought home the ark to shame the stupidity of Israel, that

made no attempt to fetch it home. God's providence is conversant about the motions even of brute-creatures, and serves its own purposes by them. The lords of the Philistines, with a suitable retinue no doubt, went after them, wondering at the power of the God of Israel; and thus those who thought to triumph over the ark were made to go like menial servants after it.

III. How it was welcomed to the land of Israel: *The men of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat-harvest*, v. 13. They were going on with their worldly business, and were in no care about the ark, made no enquiries what had become of it; if they had, it is likely they might have had private intelligence beforehand of its coming, and might have gone to meet it, and conduct it into their own border. But they were as careless as the people that *ceiled their own houses and let God's house lie waste*. Note, God will in his own time effect the deliverance of his church, not only though it be fought against by its enemies, but though it be neglected by its friends. Some observe that the returning ark found the men of Beth-shemesh, not idling or sporting in the streets of the city, but busy, reaping their corn in their fields, and well employed. Thus the tidings of the birth of Christ were brought to the shepherds when they were *keeping their flock by night*. The devil visits idle men with his temptations. God visits industrious men with his favours. The same invisible hand that directed the kine to the land of Israel brought them into the field of Joshua, and in that field they stood, some think for the owner's sake, on whom, being a very good man, they suppose God designed to put this honour. I rather think it was for the sake of the great stone in that field, which was convenient to put the ark upon, and which is spoken of, v. 14, 15, 18. Now, 1. When the reapers saw the ark, they rejoiced (v. 13); their joy for that was greater than the joy of harvest, and therefore they left their work to bid it welcome. When the Lord turned again the captivity of his ark they were *like men that dream; then was their mouth filled with laughter*, Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2. Though they had not zeal and courage enough to attempt the rescue or ransom of it, yet, when it did come, they had it heartily welcome. Note, The return of the ark, and the revival of holy ordinances, after days of restraint and trouble, cannot but be matter of great joy to every faithful Israelite. 3. They offered up the kine for a burnt-offering, to the honour of God, and made use of the wood of the cart for fuel, v. 14. Probably the Philistines intended these, when they sent them, to be a part of their trespass-offering, to make atonement, v. 3, 7. However, the men of Beth-shemesh looked upon it as proper to make this use of them, because it was by no means fit that ever they should be put to any other use;

never shall that cart carry any common thing that has once carried that sacred symbol of the divine presence: and the kine had been under such an immediate guidance of heaven that God had, as it were, already laid claim to them; they were servants to him, and therefore must be sacrifices to him, and no doubt were accepted, though females, whereas, in strictness, every burnt-offering was to be a male. 3. They deposited the ark, with a chest of jewels that the Philistines presented, upon the great stone in the open field, a cold lodging for the ark of the Lord and a very mean one; yet better so than in Dagon's temple, or in the hands of the Philistines. It is desirable to see the ark in its habitation in all the circumstances of solemnity and splendour; but better have it upon a great stone, and in the fields of the wood, than be without it. The intrinsic grandeur of instituted ordinances ought not to be diminished in our eyes by the meanness and poverty of the place where they are administered. As the burning of the cart and cows that brought home the ark might be construed to signify their hopes that it should never be carried away again out of the land of Israel, so the setting of it upon a great stone might signify their hopes that it should be established again upon a firm foundation. The church is built upon a rock. 4. They offered the sacrifices of thanksgiving to God, some think upon the great stone, more probably upon an altar of earth made for the purpose, v. 15. And, the case being extraordinary, the law for offering at the altar in the court of the tabernacle was dispensed with, and the more easily because Shiloh was now dismantled; God himself had forsaken it, and the ark, which was its chief glory, they had with them here. Beth-shemesh, though it lay within the lot of the tribe of Dan, yet belonged to Judah, so that this accidental bringing of the ark hither was an indication of its designed settlement there, in process of time; for, when God refused the tabernacle of Joseph, he chose the tribe of Judah, Ps. lxxviii. 67, 68. It was one of those cities which were assigned out of the lot of Judah to the sons of Aaron, Josh. xxi. 16. Whither should the ark go but to a priests' city? And it was well they had those of that sacred order ready (for though they are here called *Lerites*, v. 15, yet it should seem they were priests) both to take down the ark and to offer the sacrifices. 5. The lords of the Philistines returned to Ekron, much affected, we may suppose, with what they had seen of the glory of God and the zeal of the Israelites, and yet not reclaimed from the worship of Dagon; for how seldom has a nation changed its gods, though they were no gods! Jer. ii. 11. Though they cannot but think the God of Israel glorious in holiness and fearful in praises, yet they are resolved they will think Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, at least as

good as he, and to him they will cleave because he is theirs. 6. Notice is taken of the continuance of the great stone in the same place; there it is *unto this day* (v. 18), because it remained a lasting memorial of this great event, and served to support the traditional history by which it was transmitted to posterity. The fathers would say to the children, "This is the stone upon which the ark of God was set when it came out of the Philistines' hands, a thing never to be forgotten."

19 And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. 20 And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us? 21 And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you.

Here is, 1. The sin of the men of Beth-shemesh: *They looked into the ark of the Lord*, v. 19. Every Israelite had heard great talk of the ark, and had been possessed with a profound veneration for it; but they had been told that it was lodged within a veil, and even the high priest himself might not look upon it but once a year, and then through a cloud of incense. Perhaps this made many say (as we are apt to covet that which is forbidden) what a great deal they would give for a sight of it. Some of these Beth-shemites, we may suppose, for that reason, rejoiced to see the ark (v. 13) more than for the sake of the public. Yet this did not content them; they might see it, but they would go further, they would take off the covering, which it is likely was nailed or screwed on, and look into it, under pretence of seeing whether the Philistines had not taken the two tables out of it or some way damaged them, but really to gratify a sinful curiosity of their own, which intruded into those things that God had thought fit to conceal from them. Note, It is a great affront to God for vain men to pry into and meddle with the secret things which belong not to them, Dent. xxix. 29; Col. ii. 18. We were all ruined by an ambition of forbidden knowledge. That which made this looking into the ark a great sin was that it proceeded from a very low and mean opinion of the ark. The familiarity they had with it upon this occasion bred contempt and irreverence. Perhaps they presumed upon their being priests; but the dignity of the ministerial office will

be so far from excusing that it will aggravate a careless and irreverent treatment of holy things. They should, by their example, have taught others to keep their distance and look upon the ark with a holy awe. Perhaps they presumed upon the kind entertainment they had given the ark, and the sacrifices they had now offered to welcome it home with, for which they thought the ark was indebted to them, and they might be allowed to repay themselves with the satisfaction of looking into it. But let no man think that his service done for God will justify him in any instance of disrespect or irreverence towards the things of God. Or it may be they presumed upon the present mean circumstances the ark was in, newly come out of captivity, and unsettled; now that it stood upon a cold stone, they thought they might make free with it; they should never have such another opportunity of being familiar with it. It is an offence to God if we think meanly of his ordinances because of the meanness of the manner of their administration. Had they looked with an understanding eye upon the ark, and not judged purely by outward appearance, they would have thought that the ark never shone with greater majesty than it did now. It had triumphed over the Philistines, and come out of its house of bondage (like Christ out of the grave) by its own power; had they considered this, they would not have looked into it thus, as a common chest. 2. Their punishment for this sin: *He smote the men of Beth-shemesh, many of them, with a great slaughter.* How jealous is God for the honour of his ark! He will not suffer it to be profaned. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.* Those that will not fear his goodness, and reverently use the tokens of his grace, shall be made to feel his justice, and sink under the tokens of his displeasure. Those that pry into what is forbidden, and come too near to holy fire, will find it is at their peril. *He smote 50,070 men.* This account of the numbers smitten is expressed in a very unusual manner in the original, which, besides the improbability that there should be so many guilty and so many slain, occasions many learned men to question whether we take the matter aright. In the original it is, *He smote in (or among) the people three score and ten men, fifty thousand men.* The Syriac and Arabic read it, *five thousand and seventy men.* The Chaldee reads it, *seventy men of the elders, and fifty thousand of the common people.* *Seventy men as valuable as 50,000,* so some, because they were priests. Some think the seventy men were the Beth-shemites that were slain for looking into the ark, and the 50,000 were those that were slain by the ark, in the land of the Philistines. *He smote seventy men,* that is, *fifty out of a thousand,* which was one in twenty, a half decimation; so some understand it. The Septuagint read it much as we do, *he smote seventy men, and fifty thou-*

*sand men.* Josephus says only seventy were smitten. 3. The terror that was struck upon the men of Beth-shemesh by this severe stroke. They said, as well they might, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* v. 20. Some think this expresses their murmuring against God, as if he had dealt hardly and unjustly with them. Instead of quarrelling with themselves and their own sins, they quarrelled with God and his judgments; as *David was displeased,* in a case not much dissimilar, 2 Sam. vi. 8, 9. I rather think it intimates their awful and reverent adoration of God, as the Lord God, as a holy Lord God, and as a God before whom none is able to stand. This they infer from that tremendous judgment, "Who is able to stand before the God of the ark? To stand before God to worship him (blessed be his name) is not impossible; we are through Christ invited, encouraged, and enabled to do it, but to stand before God to contend with him we are not able. Who is able to stand before the throne of his immediate glory, and look full upon it? 1 Tim. vi. 16. Who is able to stand before the tribunal of his inflexible justice, and make his part good there? Ps. cxxx. 3; cxliii. 2. Who is able to stand before the arm of his provoked power, and either resist or bear the strokes of it? Ps. lxxvi. 7. 4. Their desire, hereupon, to be rid of the ark. They asked, *To whom shall he go up from us?* v. 20. They should rather have asked, "How may we make our peace with him, and recover his favour?" Mic. vi. 6, 7. But they begin to be as weary of the ark as the Philistines had been, whereas, if they had treated it with due reverence, who knows but it might have taken up its residence among them, and they had all been blessed for the ark's sake? But thus, when the word of God works with terror on sinners' consciences, they, instead of taking the blame and shame to themselves, quarrel with the word, and put it from them, Jer. vi. 10. They sent messengers to the elders of Kirjath-jearim, a strong city further up in the country, and begged of them to come and fetch the ark up thither, v. 21. They durst not touch it to bring it thither themselves, but stood aloof from it as a dangerous thing. Thus do foolish men run from one extreme to the other, from presumptuous boldness to slavish shyness. Kirjath-jearim, that is, *the city of woods,* belonged to Judah, Josh. xv. 9, 60. It lay in the way from Beth-shemesh to Shiloh, so that when they sent to them to fetch it, we may suppose, they intended that the elders of Shiloh should fetch it thence, but God intended otherwise. Thus was it sent from town to town, and no care taken of it by the public, a sign that there was no king in Israel.

## CHAP. VII.

In this chapter we have, 1. The eclipsing of the glory of the ark, by its privacy in Kirjath-jearim for many years, ver. 1. 2. II. The appearing of the glory of Samuel in his public services for the good of Israel, to whom he was raised up to be a judge, and he

was the last that bore that character. This chapter gives us all the account we have of him when he was in the prime of his time; for what we had before was in his childhood (ch. i. and iii.); what we have of him after was in his old age, ch. viii. 1. We have him here active, 1. In the reformation of Israel from their idolatry, ver. 3, 4. 2. In the reviving of religion among them, ver. 5, 6. 3. In praying for them against the invading Philistines (ver. 7—9), over whom God, in answer to his prayer, gave them a glorious victory, ver. 10, 11. 4. In erecting a thankful memorial of that victory, ver. 12. 5. In the improvement of that victory, ver. 13, 14. 6. In the administration of justice, ver. 15—17. And these were the things for which God was preparing and designing him, in the early vouchsafements of his grace to him.

AND the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. 2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

Here we must attend the ark to Kirjath-jearim, and then leave it there, to hear not a word more of it except once (ch. xiv. 18), till David fetched it thence, about forty years after, 1 Chron. xiii. 6.

1. We are very willing to attend it thither, for the men of Beth-shemesh have by their own folly made that a burden which might have been a blessing; and gladly would we see it among those to whom it will be a *savour of life unto life*, for in every place where it has been of late it has been a *savour of death unto death*. Now,

1. The men of Kirjath-jearim cheerfully bring it among them, v. 1. *They came*, at the first word, *and fetched up the ark of the Lord*. Their neighbours the Beth-shemites, were not more glad to get rid of it than they were to receive it, knowing very well that what slaughter the ark had made at Beth-shemesh was not an act of arbitrary power, but of necessary justice, and those that suffered by it must blame themselves, not the ark; we may depend upon the word which God hath said (Jer. xxv. 6), *Provoke me not, and I will do you no hurt*. Note, The judgments of God on those who profane his ordinances should not make us afraid of the ordinances, but of profaning them and making an ill use of them.

2. They carefully provided for its decent entertainment among them, as a welcome guest, with true affection, and, as an honourable guest, with respect and reverence.

(1.) They provided a proper place to receive it. They had no public building to adorn with it, but they lodged it in the house of Abinadab, which stood upon the highest ground, and, probably, was the best house in their city; or perhaps the master of it was the most eminent man they had for piety, and best affected to the ark. The men of Beth-shemesh left it exposed upon a stone in the open field, and, though it was a city of priests, none of them received it into his

house; but the men of Kirjath-jearim, though common Israelites, gave it house-room, and no doubt the best-furnished room in the house to which it was brought. Note, [1.] God will find out a resting-place for his ark; if some thrust it from them, yet the hearts of others shall be inclined to receive it. [2.] It is no new thing for God's ark to be thrust into a private house. Christ and his apostles preached from house to house when they could not have public places at command. [3.] Sometimes priests are shamed and out-done in religion by common Israelites.

(2.) They provided a proper person to attend it: *They sanctified Eleazar his son to keep it*; not the father, either because he was aged and infirm, or because he had the affairs of his house and family to attend, from which they would not take him off. But the son, who, it is probable, was a very pious devout young man, and zealously affected towards the best things. His business was to keep the ark, not only from being seized by malicious Philistines, but from being touched or looked into by too curious Israelites. He was to keep the room clean and decent in which the ark was, that, though it was in an obscure place, it might not look like a neglected thing, which no man looked after. It does not appear that this Eleazar was of the tribe of Levi, much less of the house of Aaron, nor was it needful that he should, for here was no altar either for sacrifice or incense, only we may suppose that some devout Israelites would come and pray before the ark, and those that did so he was there ready to attend and assist. For this purpose they sanctified him, that is, by his own consent, they obliged him to make this his business, and to give a constant attendance to it; they set him apart for it in the name of all their citizens. This was irregular, but was excusable because of the present distress. When the ark has but recently come out of captivity we cannot expect it to be on a sudden in its usual solemnity, but must take things as they are, and make the best of them.

II. Yet we are very loth to leave it here, wishing it well at Shiloh again, but that is made desolate (Jer. vii. 14), or at least wishing it at Nob, or Gibeon, or wherever the tabernacle and the altars are; but, it seems, it must lie by the way for want of some public-spirited men to bring it to its proper place. 1. The time of its continuance here was long, very long, above forty years it lay in these fields of the wood, a remote, obscure, private place, unfrequented and almost unregarded (v. 2): *The time that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim was long*, even till David fetched it thence. It was very strange that all the time that Samuel governed the ark was never brought to its place in the holy of holies, an evidence of the decay of holy zeal among them. God suffered it to be so, to punish them for their neglect of the ark

when it was in its place and to show that the great stress which the institution laid upon the ark was but typical of Christ, and those *good things to come which cannot be moved*, Heb. ix. 23; xii. 27. It was a just reproach to the priests that one not of their order was sanctified to keep the ark. 2. Twenty years of this time had passed before the house of Israel was sensible of the want of the ark. The Septuagint read it somewhat more clearly than we do; *and it was twenty years, and (that is, when) the whole house of Israel looked up again after the Lord*. So long the ark remained in obscurity, and the Israelites were not sensible of the inconvenience, nor ever made any enquiry after it, what has become of it; though, while it was absent from the tabernacle, the token of God's special presence was wanting, nor could they keep the day of atonement as it should be kept. They were content with the altars without the ark; so easily can formal professors rest satisfied in a round of external performances, without any tokens of God's presence or acceptance. But at length they bethought themselves, and began to lament after the Lord, stirred up to it, it is probable, by the preaching of Samuel, with which an extraordinary working of the Spirit of God set in. A general disposition to repentance and reformation now appears throughout all Israel, and they begin to *look unto him whom they had sinned, and to mourn*, Zech. xii. 10. Dr. Lightfoot thinks this was a matter and time as remarkable as almost any we read of in scripture; and that that great conversion, Acts ii. and iii., is the only parallel to it. Note, (1.) Those that know how to value God's ordinances cannot but reckon it a very lamentable thing to want them. (2.) True repentance and conversion begin in lamenting after the Lord; we must be sensible that by sin we have provoked him to withdraw and are undone if we continue in a state of distance from him, and be restless till we have recovered his favour and obtained his gracious returns. It was better with the Israelites when they wanted the ark, and were lamenting after it, than when they had the ark, and were prying into it, or priding themselves in it. Better see people longing in the scarcity of the means of grace than loathing in the abundance of them.

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. 4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD

only. 5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD. 6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured *it* out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

We may well wonder where Samuel was and what he was doing all this while, for we have not had him so much as named till now, since *ch. iv. 1*, not as if he were unconcerned, but his labours among his people are not mentioned till there appears the fruit of them. When he perceived that they began to *lament after the Lord* he struck while the iron was hot, and two things he endeavoured to do for them, as a faithful servant of God and a faithful friend to the Israel of God:—

I. He endeavoured to separate between them and their idols, for *there* reformation must begin. He *spoke to all the house of Israel (v. 3)*, going, as it should seem, from place to place, an itinerant preacher (for we find not that they were gathered together till *v. 5*), and wherever he came this was his exhortation, "*If you do indeed return to the Lord, as you seem inclined to do, by your lamentations for your departure from him and his from you, then know, 1. That you must renounce and abandon your idols, put away the strange gods, for your God will admit no rival; put them away from you, each one from himself, nay, and put them from among you, do what you can, in your places, to rid them out of the country. Put away Baalim, the strange gods, and Ashtaroth, the strange goddesses,*" for such also they had. Or Ashtaroth is particularly named because it was the best-beloved idol, and that which they were most wedded to. Note, True repentance strikes at the darling sin, and will with a peculiar zeal and resolution put away that, the sin which most *easily besets us*. 2. "That you must make a solemn business of returning to God, and do it with a serious consideration and a steadfast resolution, for both are included in *preparing the heart*, directing, disposing, establishing, the heart unto the Lord. 3. That you must be wholly for God, for him and no other, *serve him only*, else you do not serve him at all so as to please him. 4. That this is the only way and a sure way to prosperity and deliverance. Take this course, and *he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines*; for it was because you forsook him and served other gods that he delivered you into their hands." This was the purport of Samuel's preaching, and it had a wonderfully good effect (*v. 4*): *They put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, not only quitted the worship of them,*

but destroyed their images, demolished their altars, and quite abandoned them. *What have we to do any more with idols?* Hos. xiv. 8; Isa. xxx. 22.

II. He endeavoured to engage them for ever to God and his service. Now that he had them in a good mind he did all he could to keep them in it.

1. He summons all Israel, at least by their elders, as their representatives, to meet him at Mizpeh (v. 5), and there he promises to pray for them. And it was worth while for them to come from the remotest part of the country to join with Samuel in seeking God's favour. Note, Ministers should pray for those to whom they preach, that God by his grace would make the preaching effectual. And, when we come together in religious assemblies, we must remember that it is as much our business there to join in public prayers as it is to hear a sermon. He would pray for them that, by the grace of God, they might be parted from their idols, and that then, by the providence of God, they might be delivered from the Philistines. Ministers would profit their people more if they did but pray more for them.

2. They obey his summons, and not only come to the meeting, but conform to the intentions of it, and appear there very well disposed, v. 6.

(1.) *They drew water and poured it out before the Lord*, signifying, [1.] Their humiliation and contrition for sin, owning themselves as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again (2 Sam. xiv. 14), so mean, so miserable, before God, Ps. xxii. 14. The Chaldee reads it, *They poured out their hearts in repentance before the Lord*. They wept rivers of tears, and sorrowed after a godly sort, for it was before the Lord and with an eye to him. [2.] Their earnest prayers and supplications to God for mercy. The soul is, in prayer, poured out before God, Ps. lxii. 8. [3.] Their universal reformation; they thus expressed their willingness to part with all their sins, and to retain no more of the relish or savour of them than the vessel does of the water that is poured out of it. They were free and full in their confession, and fixed in their resolution to cast away from them *all their transgressions*. Israel is now *baptized from their idols*, so Dr. Lightfoot. [4.] Some think it signifies their joy in the hope of God's mercy, which Samuel had assured them of. This ceremony was used with that signification at the feast of tabernacles, John vii. 37, 38, and see Isa. xii. 3. Taking it in this sense, it must be read, *They drew water after they had fasted*. In the close of their humiliation they thus expressed their hope of pardon and reconciliation.

(2.) *They fasted*, abstained from food, afflicted their souls, so expressing repentance and exciting devotion.

(3.) They made a public confession. *We have sinned against the Lord*, so giving glory to God and taking shame to themselves. And, if we thus confess our sins, we shall find our God *faithful and just to forgive us our sins*.

3. Samuel judged them at that time in Mizpeh, that is, he assured them, in God's name, of the pardon of their sins, upon their repentance, and that God was reconciled to them. It was a judgment of absolution. Or he received informations against those that did not leave their idols, and proceeded against them according to law. Those that would not judge themselves he judged. Or now he settled courts of justice among them, and appointed the terms and circuits which he observed afterwards, v. 16. Now he set those wheels a-going; and, whereas before he acted only as a prophet, now he began to act as a magistrate, to prevent their relapsing into those sins which now they seemed to have renounced.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard *it*, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it* for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him. 10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until *they came* under Beth-ezer. 12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set *it* between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

Here, I. The Philistines invade Israel (v. 7), taking umbrage from that general meeting for repentance and prayer as if it had been a rendezvous for war, and, if so, they thought it prudent to keep the war out of

their own country. They had no just cause for this suspicion; but those that seek to do mischief to others will be forward to imagine that others design mischief to them. Now see here, 1. How evil sometimes seems to come out of good. The religious meeting of the Israelites at Mizpeh brought trouble upon them from the Philistines, which perhaps tempted them to wish they had staid at home and to blame Samuel for calling them together. But we may be in God's way and yet meet with distress; nay, when sinners begin to repent and reform, they must expect that Satan will muster all his force against them, and set his instruments on work to the utmost to oppose and discourage them. But, 2. How good is, at length, brought out of that evil. Israel could never be threatened more seasonably than at this time, when they were repenting and praying, nor could they have been better prepared to receive the enemy; nor could the Philistines have acted more impolitically for themselves than to make war upon Israel at this time, when they were making their peace with God. But God permitted them to do it, that he might have an opportunity immediately of crowning his people's reformation with tokens of his favour, and of confirming the words of his messenger, who had assured them that if they repented God would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines. Thus he makes man's wrath to praise him, and serves the purposes of his grace to his people even by the malicious designs of their enemies against them, Mic. iv. 11, 12.

II. Israel cleaves closely to Samuel, as their best friend, under God, in this distress; though he was no military man, nor ever celebrated as a mighty man of valour, yet, being afraid of the Philistines, for whom they thought themselves an unequal match, they engaged Samuel's prayers for them: *Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, v. 8.* They were here unarmed, unprepared for war, come together to fast and pray, not to fight; prayers and tears therefore being all the weapons many of them are now furnished with, to these they have recourse. And, knowing Samuel to have a great interest in heaven, they earnestly beg of him to improve it for them. They had reason to expect it, because he had promised to *pray for them (v. 5)*, had promised them deliverance from the Philistines (*v. 3*), and they had been observant of him in all that which he had spoken to them from the Lord. Thus those who sincerely submit to Christ, as their lawgiver and judge, need not doubt of their interest in his intercession. They were very solicitous that Samuel should not cease to pray for them: what military preparations were to be made they would undertake them, but let him continue instant in prayer, perhaps remembering that when Moses did but let down his hand ever so

little Amalek prevailed. O what a comfort is it to all believers that our great intercessor above never ceases, is never silent, for he *always appears in the presence of God for us!*

III. Samuel intercedes with God for them, and does it *by sacrifice, v. 9.* He took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a *burnt-offering, a whole burnt-offering, to the Lord*, and, while the sacrifice was in burning, with the smoke of it his prayers ascended up to heaven for Israel. Observe, 1. He made intercession with a sacrifice. Christ intercedes in the virtue of his satisfaction, and in all our prayers we must have an eye to his great oblation, depending upon that for audience and acceptance. Samuel's sacrifice without his prayer would have been an empty shadow, his prayer without the sacrifice would not have been so prevalent, but both together teach us what great things we may expect from God in answer to those prayers which are made with faith in Christ's sacrifice. 2. It was a burnt-offering, which was offered purely for the glory of God, so intimating that the great plea he relied on in his prayer was taken from the honour of God. "Lord, help thy people now for thy name's sake." When we endeavour to give glory to God we may hope he will, in answer to our prayers, work for his own glory. 3. It was but one sucking lamb that he offered; for it is the integrity and intention of the heart that God looks at, more than the bulk or number of the offerings. This one lamb (typifying the Lamb of God) was more acceptable than thousands of rams or bullocks would have been without faith and prayer. Samuel was no priest, but he was a Levite and a prophet; the case was extraordinary, and what he did was by special direction, and therefore was accepted of God. And justly was this reproach put upon the priests because they had corrupted themselves.

IV. God gave a gracious answer to Samuel's prayer (*v. 9*): *The Lord heard him.* He was himself a *Samuel, asked of God*, and many a Samuel, many a mercy in answer to prayer, God gave him. Sons of prayer should be famous for praying, as *Samuel was among those that call upon his name, Ps. xcix. 6.* The answer was a real answer: the Philistines were discomfited (*v. 10, 11*), totally routed, and that in such a manner as highly magnified the prayer of Samuel, the power of God, and the valour of Israel. 1. The prayer of Samuel was honoured; for at the very time when he was offering up his sacrifice, and his prayer with it, the battle began, and turned immediately against the Philistines. Thus *while he was yet speaking God heard*, and answered in thunder, Isa. lxxv. 24. God showed that it was Samuel's prayer and sacrifice that he had respect to, and hereby let Israel know that as in a former engagement with the Philistines he had justly chastised their presumptuous confidence in the presence of the ark, on the shoulders of two

profane priests, so now he graciously accepted their humble dependence upon the prayer of faith from the mouth and heart of a pious prophet. 2. The power of God was greatly honoured; for he took the work into his own hand, and discomfited them, not with great hail-stones, which would kill them (as Josh. x. 11), but with a great thunder, which frightened them and put them into such terror and consternation that they fainted away, and became a very easy prey to the sword of Israel, before whom, being thus confounded, they were smitten. Josephus adds that the earth quaked under them when first they made the onset and in many places opened and swallowed them up, and that, besides the terror of the thunder, their faces and hands were burnt with lightning, which obliged them to shift for themselves by flight. And, being thus driven to their heels by the immediate hand of God (whom they feared not so much as they had feared his ark, *ch.* iv. 7), then, 3. Honour was put upon the hosts of Israel; they were made use of for the completing of the victory, and had the pleasure of triumphing over their oppressors: *They pursued the Philistines, and smote them.* How soon did they find the benefit of their repentance, and reformation, and return to God! Now that they have thus engaged him for their none of their enemies can stand before them.

V. Samuel erected a thankful memorial of this victory, to the glory of God and for the encouragement of Israel, *v.* 12. He set up an *Eben-ezer, the stone of help.* If ever the people's hard hearts should lose the impressions of this providence, this stone would either revive the remembrance of it, and make them thankful, or remain a standing witness against them for their unthankfulness. 1. The place where this memorial was set up was the same where, twenty years before, the Israelites were smitten before the Philistines, for that was beside *Eben-ezer, ch.* iv. 1. The sin which procured that defeat formerly being pardoned upon their repentance, the pardon was sealed by this glorious victory in the very same place where they then suffered loss; see *Ilos.* i. 10. 2. Samuel himself took care to set up this monument. He had been instrumental by prayer to obtain the mercy, and therefore he thought himself in a special manner obliged to make this grateful acknowledgment of it. 3. The reason he gives for the name is, *Hitherto the Lord hath helped us*, in which he speaks thankfully of what was past, giving the glory of the victory to God only, who had added this to all his former favours; and yet he speaks somewhat doubtfully for the future: "Hitherto things have done well, but what God may yet do with us we know not, *that* we refer to him; but let us praise him for what he has done." Note, The beginnings of mercy and deliverance are to be acknowledged by us with thankfulness

so far as they go, though they be not completely finished, nay, though the issue seem uncertain. *Having obtained help from God, I continue hitherto*, says blessed Paul, *Acts* xxvi. 22.

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. 15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. 16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. 17 And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

We have here a short account of the further good services that Samuel did to Israel. Having parted them from their idols, and brought them home to their God, he had put them into a capacity of receiving further benefits by his ministry. Having prevailed in that, he becomes, in other instances, a great blessing to them; yet, writing it himself, he is brief in the relation. We are not told here, but it appears (*2 Chron.* xxxv. 18) that in the days of Samuel the prophet the people of Israel kept the ordinance of the passover with more than ordinary devotion, notwithstanding the distance of the ark and the desolations of Shiloh. Many good offices, no doubt, he did for Israel, but here we are only told how instrumental he was, 1. In securing the public peace (*v.* 13): "*In his days the Philistines came no more into the coast of Israel, made no inroads or incursions upon them; they perceived that God now fought for Israel and that his hand was against the Philistines, and this kept them in awe, and restrained the remainder of their wrath.*" Samuel was a protector and deliverer to Israel, not by dint of sword, as Gideon, nor by strength of arm, as Samson, but by the power of prayer to God and carrying on a work of reformation among the people. Religion and piety are the best securities of a nation. 2. In recovering the public rights, *v.* 14. By his influence Israel had the courage to demand the cities which the Philistines had unjustly taken from them and had long detained; and the Philistines, not daring to contend with one that had so great an interest in heaven, tamely yielded to the demand, and



restored (some think) even Ekron and Gath, two of their capital cities, though afterwards they retook them; others think some small towns that lay between Ekron and Gath, which were forced out of the Philistines' hands. This they got by their reformation and religion, they got ground of their enemies and got forward in their affairs. It is added, *There was peace between Israel and the Amorites*, that is, the Canaanites, the remains of the natives. Not that Israel made any league with them, but they were quiet, and not so mischievous to Israel as they had sometimes been. Thus *when a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* and give him no disturbance, Prov. xvi. 7. 3. In administering public justice (c. 15, 16): *He judged Israel*; as a prophet he taught them their duty and reproved them for their sins, which is called *judging*, Ezek. xx. 4; xxii. 2. Moses judged Israel when he made them know the statutes of God and his laws (Exod. xviii. 16); and thus Samuel judged them to the last, even after Saul was made king; so he promised them then, when Saul was inaugurated (ch. xii. 23), *I will not cease to teach you the good and the right way*. As a magistrate, he received appeals from the inferior courts and gave judgment upon them, tried causes and determined them, tried prisoners and acquitted or condemned them, according to the law. This he did all his days, till he grew old and past service, and resigned to Saul; and afterwards he exercised authority when application was made to him: nay, he judged even Agag, and Saul himself. But when he was in his prime he rode the circuit, for the convenience of the country, at least of that part of it which lay most under his influence. He kept courts at Beth-el, Gilgal, and Mizpeh, all in the tribe of Benjamin; but his constant residence was at Ramah, his father's city, and there he judged Israel, thither they resorted to him from all parts with their complaints, v. 17. 4. In keeping up the public exercises of religion; for there, where he lived, he built an altar to the Lord, not in contempt of the altar that was at Nob, or Gibeon, or wherever the tabernacle was; but divine justice having laid Shiloh waste, and no other place being yet chosen for them to bring their offerings to (Deut. xii. 11), he looked upon the law which confined them to one place to be for the present suspended, and therefore, being a prophet, and under divine direction, he did as the patriarchs did, he built an altar where he lived, both for the use of his own family and for the good of the country that resorted to it. Great men should use their wealth, power, and interest, for the keeping up of religion in the places where they live.

## CHAP. VIII.

Things went so very well with Israel, in the chapter before, under Samuel's administration, that, methinks, it is a pity to find him so quickly, as we do in this chapter, old, and going off, and things

working towards a revolution. But so it is; Israel's good day seldom continue long. We have here, I. Samuel decaying, ver. 1. 11. His sons degenerating, ver. 2, 3. III. Israel discontented with the present government and anxious to see a change. For 1. They petition Samuel to set a king over them, ver. 4, 5. 2. Samuel brings the matter to God, ver. 6. 3. God directs him what answer to give them, by way of reproof (ver. 7, 8), and by way of remonstrance, setting forth the consequences of a change of the government, and how uneasy they would soon be under it, ver. 9—18. 4. They insist upon their petition, ver. 19, 20. 5. Samuel promises them, from God, that they shall shortly be gratified, ver. 21, 22. Thus hard is it for people to know what they are well off.

AND it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beer-sheba. 3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

Two sad things we find here, but not strange things:—1. A good and useful man growing old and unfit for service (v. 1): *Samuel was old*, and could not judge Israel, as he had done. He is not reckoned to be past sixty years of age now, perhaps not so much; but he was a man sometimes, was full of thoughts and cares when he was a child, which perhaps hastened the infirmities of age upon him. The fruits that are the first ripe keep the worst. He had spent his strength and spirits in the fatigue of public business, and now, if he think to shake himself as at other times, he finds he is mistaken: old age has cut his hair. Those that are in the prime of their time ought to be busy in doing the work of life: for, as they go into years, they will find themselves less disposed to it and less able for it. 2. The children of a good man turning aside, and not treading in his steps. Samuel had given his sons so good an education, and they had given him such good hopes of their doing well, and gained such a reputation in Israel, that he made them judges, assistants to him awhile, and afterwards deputies under him at Beer-sheba, which lay remote from Ramah, v. 2. Probably the southern countries petitioned for their residence there, that they might not be necessitated to travel far with their causes. We have reason to think that Samuel gave them their commissions, not because they were his sons (he had no ambition to entail the government upon his family, any more than Gideon had), but because, for aught that yet appeared, they were men very fit for the trust; and none so proper to ease the aged judge, and take some of the burden off him, as (*cæteris paribus—other things being equal*) his own sons, who no doubt were respected for their good father's sake, and, having such an advantage at setting out, might soon have been great if they had not been good. But, alas! *his sons walked not in his ways* (v. 3), and, when their character was the reverse of his, their relation to so good a man, which otherwise would have been their

honour, was really their disgrace. *Degeneranti genus opprobrium—A good extraction is a reproach to him that degenerates from it.* Note, Those that have the most grace themselves cannot give grace to their children. It has often been the grief of good men to see their posterity, instead of treading in their steps, trampling upon them, and, as Job speaks, *marring their path.* Nay, many that have begun well, promised fair, and set out in the right path, so that their parents and friends have had great hopes of them, yet afterwards have turned aside to by-paths, and been the grief of those of whom they should have been the joy. When Samuel's sons were made judges, and settled at a distance from him, then they discovered themselves. Thus, (1.) Many that have been well educated, and have conducted themselves well while they were under their parents' eye, when they have gone abroad into the world and set up for themselves have proved bad. Let none therefore be secure either of themselves or theirs, but depend on divine grace. (2.) Many that have done well in a state of meanness and subjection have been spoiled by preferment and power. Honours change men's minds, and too often for the worse. It does not appear that Samuel's sons were so profane and vicious as Eli's sons; but, whatever they were in other respects, they were corrupt judges, they *turned aside after lucre, after the mammon of unrighteousness*, so the Chaldee reads it. Note, *The love of money is the root of all evil.* It is pernicious in any, but especially in judges. Samuel had taken no bribes (*ch. xii. 3*), but his sons had, though, no doubt, he warned them against it when he made them judges; and then they perverted judgment. In determining controversies, they had an eye to the bribe, not to the law, and enquired who bid highest, not who had right on his side. It is sad with a people when the public justice that should do them right, being perverted, does them the greatest wrong.

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, 5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. 6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. 7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. 8 According to all the

works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. 9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. 10 And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. 11 And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint *them* for himself, for his chariots, and *to be* his horsemen; and *some* shall run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and *will set them* to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13 And he will take your daughters *to be* concubines, and *to be* cooks, and *to be* bakers. 14 And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, *even the best of them*, and give *them* to his servants. 15 And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16 And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put *them* to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18 And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. 19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; 20 That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles. 21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice and make them a king. And Samuel

said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city.

We have here the starting of a matter perfectly new and surprising, which was the setting up of kingly government in Israel. Perhaps the thing had been often talked of among them by those that were given to change and affected that which looked great. But we do not find that it was ever till now publicly proposed and debated. Abimelech was little better than a titular king, though he is said to reign over Israel (Judges ix. 22), and perhaps his fall had for a great while rendered the title of king odious in Israel, as that of Tarquinius did among the Romans; but, if it had, by this time the odium was worn off, and some bold steps are here taken towards so great a revolution as that amounted to. Here is,

I. The address of the elders to Samuel in this matter (v. 4, 5): They gathered themselves together, by common consent; and not in a riotous tumultuous manner, but with the respect due to his character, they came to him to his house at Ramah with their address, which contained,

1. A remonstrance of their grievances: in short, *Thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways.* Many a fairer occasion that people had had to ask a king, when they were oppressed by their neighbours or embroiled at home for want of a king in Israel, but a small thing will serve factious spirits for a colour to desire a change. (1.) It was true that Samuel was old; but if that made him less able to ride the circuit, and sit long on the bench, yet it made him the more wise and experienced, and, upon that account, the fitter to rule. If he was old, had he not grown old in their service? And it was very unkind, ungrateful, nay, and unjust, to cast him off when he was old, who had spent his days in doing them good. God had saved his youth from being despicable (ch. iii. 20), yet they make his old age so, which should have been counted worthy of double honour. If old people be upbraided with their infirmities, and laid aside for them, let them not think it strange; Samuel himself was so. (2.) It was true that his sons did not walk in his ways; the more was his grief, but they could not say it was his fault: he had not, like Eli, indulged them in their badness, but was ready to receive complaints against them. And, if that had been the thing desired, we may well suppose, upon the making out of the charge of bribery against them he would have superseded their commissions and punished them. But this would not content the elders of Israel; they had another project in their head.

2. A petition for the redress of these grievances, by setting a king over them: *Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.* Thus far it was well, that they did not rise up in rebellion against Samuel and set up a king for

themselves, *vi et armis—by force*; but they applied to Samuel, God's prophet, and humbly begged of him to do it. But it appears by what follows that it was an evil proposal and ill made, and was displeasing to God. God designed them a king, a man after his own heart, when Samuel was dead; but they would anticipate God's counsel, and would have one now that Samuel was old. They had a prophet to judge them, that had immediate correspondence with heaven, and therein they were great and happy above any nation, none having God *so nigh unto them* as they had, Dent. iv. 7. But this would not serve; they must have a king to judge them with external pomp and power, like *all the nations*. A poor prophet in a mantle, though conversant in the visions of the Almighty, looked mean in the eyes of those who judged by outward appearance; but a king in a purple robe, with his guards and officers of state, would look great: and such a one they must have. They knew it was in vain to court Samuel to take upon him the title and dignity of a king, but he must appoint them one. They do not say, "Give us a king that is wise and good, and will judge better than thy sons do," but, "Give us a king," any body that will but make a figure. Thus foolishly did they forsake their own mercies, and, under pretence of advancing the dignity of their nation to that of their neighbours, did really thrust themselves down from their own excellency, and profane their crown by *casting it to the ground*.

II. Samuel's resentment of this address, v. 6. Let us see how he took it. 1. It cut him to the heart. Probably it was a surprise to him, and he had not any intimation before of their design, which made it the more grievous. The thing displeased Samuel; not when they upbraided him with his own infirmities and his children's irregularities (he could patiently bear what reflected on himself and his own family), but it *displeased him when they said, Give us a king to judge us*, because that reflected upon God and his honour. 2. It drove him to his knees; he gave them no answer for the present, but took time to consider of what they proposed, and prayed unto the Lord for direction what to do, spreading the case before him and leaving it with him, and so making himself easy. Samuel was a man much in prayer, and we are encouraged *in every thing to make our requests known to God*, Phil. iv. 6. When any thing disturbs us, it is our interest, as well as our duty, to show before God our trouble, and he gives us leave to be humbly free with him.

III. The instruction God gave him concerning this matter. Those that in straits seek to God shall find him nigh unto them, and ready to direct them. He tells him,

1. That which would be an allay to his displeasure. Samuel was much disturbed

at the proposal : it troubled him greatly to see his prophetic office thus slighted, and all the good turns he had done to Israel thus ungratefully returned ; but God tells him he must not think it either hard or strange. (1.) He must not think it hard that they had put this slight upon him, for they had herein put a slight upon God himself : " *They have not rejected thee only, but they have rejected me. I share with thee in the affront,*" v. 7. Note, If God interest himself in the indignities that are done us, and the contempts that are put upon us, we may well afford to bear them patiently ; nor need we think the worse of ourselves if *for his sake we bear reproach* (Ps. lxi. 7), but rather rejoice and count it an honour, Col. i. 24. Samuel must not complain that they were weary of his government, though just and gentle, for really they were weary of God's government ; this was what they disliked : *They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. God reigns over the heathen* (Ps. xlvii. 8), over all the world, but the government of Israel had hitherto been, in a more peculiar manner than ever any government was, a Theocracy, a divine government ; their judges had their call and commission immediately from God ; the affairs of their nation were under his peculiar direction. As the constitution, so the administration of their government, was by *Thus saith the Lord* ; this method they were weary of, though it was their honour and safety, above any thing, so long as they kept in with God. They were indeed so much the more exposed to calamities if they provoked God to anger by sin, and found they could not transgress at so cheap a rate as other nations could, which perhaps was the true reason why they desired to stand upon the same terms with God that other nations did. (2.) He must not think it strange, nor marvel at the matter, for they do as they always have done : *According to all the works which they have done, since the day that I brought them out of Egypt, so do they unto thee, v. 8 ;* They had at first been so very respectful and obsequious to Samuel that he began to hope they were cured of their old stubborn disposition ; but now he found himself deceived in them, and must not be surprised at it. They had always been rude to their governors, witness Moses and Aaron ; nay, *They have forsaken me and served other gods* ; the greatness of their crime, in affecting new gods, may make this crime of affecting new governors seem little. Samuel might expect they would deal treacherously, for they were called *transgressors from the womb*, Isa. xlviii. 8. This had been *their manner from their youth up*, Jer. xxii. 21.

2. He tells him that which would be an answer to their demand. Samuel would not have known what to say if God had not instructed him. Should he oppose the motion, it would bespeak a greater fondness of power

and dominion than did become a prophet, and an indulgence of his sons. Should he yield to the motion, it would look like the betraying of his trust, and he would become accessory to all the bad consequences of a change. Aaron sinned in gratifying the people when they said, *Make us gods* ; Samuel dares not therefore comply with them when they say, *Make us a king*, but he gives them, with assurance, the answer God sent them.

(1.) He must tell them that *they shall have a king. Hearken to the voice of the people*, v. 7, and again, v. 9. Not that God was pleased with their request, but, as sometimes he crosses us in love, so at other times he gratifies us in wrath ; he did so here. When they said, *Give us a king and princes he gave them a king in his anger* (see Hos. xiii. 10, 11), as he gave them quails, Ps. cvii. 15 : lxxviii. 29. God bade Samuel humour them in this matter, [1.] That they might be beaten with their own rod, and might feel, to their cost, the difference between his government and the government of a king ; see 2 Chron. xii. 8. It soon appeared how much worse their condition was, in all respects, under Saul, than it had been under Samuel. [2.] To prevent something worse. If they were not gratified, they would either rise in rebellion against Samuel or universally revolt from their religion and admit the gods of the nations, that they might have kings like them. Rather than so, let them have a king. [3.] God knows how to bring glory to himself out of it, and to serve his own wise purposes even by their foolish counsels.

(2.) But he must tell them, withal, that when they have a king they will soon have enough of him, and will, when it is too late, repent of their choice. This he must *protest solemnly to them* (v. 9), that, if they would have a king to rule them, as the eastern kings ruled their subjects, they would find the yoke exceedingly heavy. They looked only at the pomp or magnificence of a king, and thought that would make their nation great and considerable among its neighbours, and would strike a terror upon their enemies ; but he must bid them consider how they would like to bear the charges of that pomp, and how they would endure that arbitrary power which the neighbouring kings assumed. Note, Those that set their hearts inordinately upon any thing in this world ought, for the moderating of their desires, to consider the inconveniences as well as the conveniences that will attend it, and to set the one over against the other in their thoughts. Those that submit to the government of the world and the flesh are told plainly what hard masters they are, and what a tyranny the dominion of sin is ; and yet they will exchange God's government for it.

IV. Samuel's faithful delivery of God's mind to them, v. 10. He *told them all the words of the Lord*, how ill he resented it, that he construed it a rejecting of him, and con-

pared it with their serving other gods,—that he would grant their request if they insisted on it, but withal had ordered him to represent to them the certain consequences of their choice, that they would be such that if they had any reason left them, and would allow themselves to consult their own interest, they would withdraw their petition, and beg to continue as they were. Accordingly he lays before them, very particularly, what would be, not the right of a king in general, but *the manner of the king that should reign over them*, according to the pattern of the nations, *v. 11*. Samuel does not speak (as bishop Patrick expounds it) of a just and honest right of a king to do these things, for his right is quite otherwise described in that part of Moses's law which concerns the king's duty, but such a right as the kings of the nations had then acquired. *This shall be the manner of the king*, that is, "thus he must support his dignity at the expense of that which is dearest to you, and thus he will abuse his power, as those that have power are apt to do; and, having the militia in his hand, you will be under a necessity of submitting to him."

1. If they will have such a king as the nations have, let them consider, (1.) That king must have a great retinue, abundance of servants to wait on him, grooms to look after his chariots and horses, gentlemen to ride about with him, and footmen to run before his chariots. This is the chief grandeur of princes, and the imaginary glory of great men, to have a multitude of attendants. And whence must he have these? "Why, he will take your sons, who are free-born, have a liberal education, and whom you now have at your own disposal, and will appoint them for himself," *v. 11*. They must wait upon him, and be at his beck; those that used to work for their parents and themselves must work for him, *ear his ground, and reap his harvest* (*v. 12*), and count it their preferment too, *v. 16*. This would be a great change. (2.) He must keep a great table; he will not be content to dine with his neighbours upon a sacrifice, as Samuel used to do (*ch. ix. 13*); but he must have a variety of dainty dishes, forced meats, and sweet-meats, and delicate sauces; and who must prepare him these? "Why, he will take your daughters, the most ingenious and handy of them, whom you hoped to prefer to houses and tables of their own; and, whether you be willing or no, they must be his confectioners, and cooks, and bakers, and the like." (3.) "He must needs have a standing army, for guards and garrisons; and your sons, instead of being elders of your cities, and living in quiet and honour at home, must be captains over thousands and captains over fifties, and must be disposed of at the pleasure of the sovereign." (4.) "You may expect that he will have great favourites, whom, having dignified and ennobled, he must enrich, and give them estates suitable

to their honour; and which way can he do that, but out of your inheritances? *v. 14*. *He will take your fields and vineyards*, which descended to you from your ancestors, and which you hoped to leave to your posterity after you, *even the best of them*; and will not only take them to himself (you could bear that better), but he will give them to his servants, who will be your masters, and bear rule over that for which you have laboured. How will you like that?" 5. "He must have great revenues to maintain his grandeur and power with; and whence must he have them but from you? He will take the tenth of the fruits of your ground (*v. 15*), and your cattle, *v. 17*. You think the tenths, the double tenths, which the law of God has appointed for the support of the church, grievous enough, and grudge the payment of them; but, if you have a king, there must issue another tenth out of your estates, which will be levied with more rigour, for the support of the royal dignity. Consider the expense with the magnificence, and whether it will quit cost."

2. These would be their grievances, and, (1.) They would have none but God to complain to. Once they complained to the prince himself, and were answered, according to the manner of the king, *Your yoke is heavy, and I will add to it*, 1 Kings xii. 11. (2.) When they complained to God he would not hear them, *v. 18*. Nor could they expect that he should, both because they had been deaf to his calls and admonitions, and this trouble, in particular, they had brought upon themselves by rejecting him, and would not believe when he told them what would come of it. Note, When we bring ourselves into distress by our own irregular desires and projects we justly forfeit the comfort of prayer and the benefit of divine aids, and, if God be not better to us than we deserve, must have our relief in our own hands, and then it is bad with us.

V. The people's obstinacy in their demand, *v. 19, 20*. One would think such a representation of the consequences as this was, coming from God himself, who can neither deceive by his word nor be deceived in his knowledge, should have prevailed with them to waive their request: but their hearts were upon it, right or wrong, good or evil: "*We will have a king over us*, whatever God or Samuel say to the contrary; we will have a king, whatever it cost us, and whatever inconvenience we bring upon ourselves or our posterity by it." See their folly. 1. They were quite deaf to reason and blind to their own interest. They could not answer Samuel's arguments against it, nor deny the force of them, and yet they grow more violent in their request, and more insolent. Before it was, "*Pray, make us a king*;" now it is, "*Nay, but we will have a king*;" yea, that we will, because we will; nor will we bear to have any thing said against it." See the absurdity of in-

ordinate desires, and how they rob men of their reason. 2. They could not stay God's time. God had intimated to them in the law that, in due time, Israel should have a king (Deut. xvii. 14, 15), and perhaps they had some intimation that the time was at hand; but they are all in haste: "We, in our day, will have this king over us." Could they but have waited ten or twelve years longer they would have had David, a king of God's giving in mercy, and all the calamities that attended the setting up of Saul would have been prevented. Sudden resolves and hasty desires make work for a long and leisurely repentance. 3. That which they aimed at in desiring a king was not only, as before, that they might be like the nations, and levelled with the one above whom God had so far advanced them, but that they might have one to judge them, and to go out before them when they took the field, and to fight their battles. Foolish people and unwise! Could they ever desire a battle better fought for them than the last was, by Samuel's prayer and God's thunder? *ch. vii. 10.* Was victory hereby too sure to them? And were they fond of trying the chance of war at the same uncertainty that others did? So sick, it seems, were they of their privileges: and what was the issue? Their first king was slain in a battle, which none of their judges ever were; so was Josiah, one of the last and best.

VI. The dismissing of them with an intimation that very shortly they should have what they asked. 1. *Samuel rehearsed all their words in the ears of the Lord, v. 21.* Not but that God perfectly knew it, without Samuel's report; but thus he dealt faithfully between God and Israel, as a prophet, returning the answer to him that sent him; and thus he waited on God for further direction. God is fully acquainted with the state of the case we are in care and doubt about, but he will know it from us. His rehearsing it in the ears of the Lord intimates that it was done in private; for the people were not disposed to join with him in prayer to God for direction in this matter; also it bespeaks a holy familiarity, to which God graciously admits his people: they speak in the ears of the Lord, as one friend whispers with another; their communion with God is *meat they have to eat which the world knows not of*, John iv. 32. 2. God gave direction that they should have a king, since they were so inordinately set upon it (v. 22): "Make them a king, and let them make their best of him, and thank themselves if that very pomp and power which they are so eager to see their sovereign in be their plague and burden." So he gave them up to their own hearts' lusts. Samuel told them this, but sent them home for the present, every man to his city; for the designation of the person must be left to God; they had now no more to do. When God saw fit to notify the choice to Samuel they should hear further from him; in the mean

time let them keep the peace and expect the issue.

#### CHAP. IX.

Samuel had promised Israel, from God, that they should have a king: it is strange that the next news is not of candidates setting up for the government, making an interest in the people, or recommending themselves to Samuel, and, by him, to God, to be put in nomination. Why does not the prince of the tribe of Judah, whoever he is, look about him now, remembering Jacob's entail of the sceptre on that tribe? Is there never a bold aspiring man in Israel, to say, "I will be king, if God will choose me?" No, none appears, whether it is owing to a culpable mean-spiritedness or a laudable humility I know not; but surely it is what can scarcely be paralleled in the history of any kingdom; a crown, such a crown, set up, and nobody bids for it. Most governments began in the ambition of the prince to rule, but Israel's in the ambition of the people to be ruled. Had any of those elders who petitioned for a king afterwards petitioned to be king, I should have suspected that person's ambition to have been at the bottom of the motion; but now (let them have the praise of what was good in them) it was not so. God having, in the law, undertaken to choose their king (Deut. xvii. 15), they all sit still, till they hear from heaven, and that they do in this chapter, which begins the story of Saul, their first king, and, by strange steps of Providence, brings him to Samuel to be anointed privately, and so to be prepared for an election by lot, and a public commendation to the people, which follows in the next chapter. Here is, I. A short account of Saul's parentage and person, ver. 1, 2. II. A large and particular account of the bringing of him to Samuel, to whom he had been before altogether a stranger. 1. God, by revelation, had told Samuel to expect him, ver. 15, 16. 2. God, by providence, led him to Samuel. (1.) Being sent to seek his father's asses, he was at a loss, ver. 3-5. (2.) By the advice of his servant, he determined to consult Samuel, ver. 6-10. (3.) By the direction of the young maidens, he found him out, ver. 11-14. (4.) Samuel, being informed of God concerning him (ver. 17), treated him with respect in the gate (ver. 18-21), in the dining-room (ver. 22-24), and at length in private, where he prepared him to hear the surprising news that he must be king, ver. 25-27. And these beginnings would have been very hopeful and promising if it had not been that the sin of the people was the spring of this great affair.

**N**OW there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. 2 And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

We are here told, 1. What a good family Saul was of, v. 1. He was of the tribe of Benjamin; so was the New-Testament Saul, who also was called Paul, and he mentions it as his honour, for Benjamin was a favourite, Rom. xi. 1; Phil. iii. 5. That tribe had been reduced to a very small number by the fatal war with Gibeah, and much ado there was to provide wives for those 600 men that were the poor remains of it out of that diminished tribe, which is here called, with good reason, *the smallest of the tribes of Israel*, v. 21. Saul sprang as a root out of a dry ground. That tribe, though fewest in number, was first in dignity, *God giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked*, 1 Cor. xii. 24. His father was Kish, a mighty man of power, or, as the margin reads it, *in substance*; in spirit bold, in body strong, in estate wealthy. The whole lot of the tribe of Benjamin coming to be distributed among 600 men, we may suppose their inheritances were much larger than theirs who were of other tribes, an advantage which somewhat

helped to balance the disadvantage of the smallness of their number. 2. What a good figure Saul made, *v. 2*. No mention is here made of his wisdom or virtue, his learning or piety, or any of the accomplishments of his mind, but that he was a tall, proper, handsome man, that had a good face, a good shape, and a good presence, graceful and well proportioned: *Among all the children of Israel there was not a goodlier person than he*; and, as if nature had marked him for pre-eminence and superiority, he was taller by the head and shoulders than any of the people, the fitter to be a match for the giants of Gath, the champions of the Philistines. When God chose a king after his own heart he pitched upon one that was not at all remarkable for the height of his stature, nor any thing in his countenance but the innocence and sweetness that appeared there, *ch. xvi. 7, 12*. But when he chose a king after the people's heart, who aimed at nothing so much as stateliness and grandeur, he pitched upon this huge tall man, who, if he had no other good qualities, yet would look great. It does not appear that he excelled in strength so much as he did in stature; Samson did, and him they slighted, bound, and betrayed into the hands of the Philistines; justly therefore are they now put off with one who, though of uncommon height, is weak as other men. They would have a king like the nations, and the nations commonly chose portly men for their kings.

3 And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. 4 And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found *them* not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and *there they were* not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found *them* not. 5 And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that *was* with him, Come, let us return; lest my father leave *caring* for the asses, and take thought for us. 6 And he said unto him, Behold now, *there is* in this city a man of God, and *he is* an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can show us our way that we should go. 7 Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, *if* we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and *there is* not a present to bring to the man

of God: what have we? 8 And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: *that* will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way. 9 (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for *he that is now called a Prophet* was beforetime called a Seer.) 10 Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God *was*.

Here is, I. A great man rising from small beginnings. It does not appear that Saul had any preferment at all, or was in any post of honour or trust, till he was chosen king of Israel. Most that are advanced rise gradually, but Saul, from the level with his neighbours, stepped at once into the throne, according to that of Hannah, *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, 1 Sam. ii. 8. Saul, it should seem, though he was himself married and had children grown up, yet lived in his father's house, and was subject to him. Promotion comes not by chance nor human probabilities, but God is the Judge.

II. A great event arising from small occurrences. How low does the history begin! Having to trace Saul to the crown, we find him first employed as meanly as any we meet with called out to preferment.

1. Saul's father sends him with one of his servants to seek some asses that he had lost. It may be they had no way then to give public notice of such a number of asses strayed or stolen out of the grounds of Kish the Benjamite. A very good law they had to oblige men to bring back an ox or an ass that went astray, but it is to be feared that was, as other good laws, neglected and forgotten. It is easy to observe here that those who have must expect to lose, that it is wisdom to look after what is lost, that no man should think it below him to know the state of his flocks, that children should be forward to serve their parents' interests. Saul readily went to *seek his father's asses*, *v. 3, 4*. His taking care of the asses is to be ascribed, not so much to the humility of his spirit as to the plainness and simplicity of those times. But his obedience to his father in it was very commendable. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business*, and dutiful to his superiors, willing to stoop and willing to take pains? he does as Saul stand fair for preferment. The servant of Kish would be faithful only as a servant, but Saul as a son, in his own business, and therefore he was sent with him. Saul and his servants travelled far (probably on foot) in quest of the asses, but in vain:

they found them not. He missed of what he sought, but had no reason to complain of the disappointment, for he met with the kingdom, which he never dreamed of.

2. When he could not find them, he determined to return to his father (v. 5), in consideration of his father's tender concern for him, being apprehensive that if they staid out any longer his aged father would begin to fear, as Jacob concerning Joseph, that an evil beast had devoured them or some mischief had befallen them; he will *leave caring for the asses*, as much as he was in care about them, and *will take thought for us*. Children should take care that they do nothing to grieve or frighten their parents, but be tender of their tenderness.

3. His servant proposed (for, it should seem, he had more religion in him than his master) that, since they were now at Ramah, they should call on Samuel, and take his advice in this important affair. Observe here, (1.) They were close by the city where Samuel lived, and that put it into their heads to consult him (v. 6): *There is in this city a man of God*. Note, Wherever we are we should improve our opportunities of acquainting ourselves with those that are wise and good. But there are many that will consult a man of God, if he comes in their way, that would not go a step out of their way to get wisdom. (2.) The servant spoke very respectfully concerning Samuel, though he had no personal knowledge of him, but by common fame only: *He is a man of God, and an honourable man*. Note, Men of God are honourable men, and should be so in our eyes. Acquaintance with the things of God, and serviceableness to the kingdom of God, put true honour upon men, and make them great. This was the honour of Samuel, as a man of God, that *all he saith comes surely to pass*. This was observed concerning him when he was a young prophet (ch. iii. 19), *God did let none of his words fall to the ground*; and still it held true. (3.) They agreed to consult him concerning *the way that they should go; peradventure he can show us*. All the use they would make of the man of God was to be advised by him whether they should return home, or, if there were yet any hopes of finding the asses, which way they must go next—a poor business to employ a prophet about! Had they said, "Let us give up the asses for lost, and, now that we are so near the man of God, let us go and learn from him the good knowledge of God, let us consult him how we may order our conversations aright, and enquire the law at his mouth, since we may not have such another opportunity, and then we shall not lose our journey"—the proposal would have been such as became Israelites; but to make prophecy, that glory of Israel, serve so mean a turn as this, discovered too much what manner of spirit they were of. Note, Most people would rather be told their for-

tune than told their duty, how to be rich than how to be saved. If it were the business of the men of God to direct for the recovery of lost asses, they would be consulted much more than they are now that it is their business to direct for the recovery of lost souls; so preposterous is the care of most men! (4.) Saul was thoughtful what present they should bring to the man of God, what fee they should give him for his advice (v. 7): *What shall we bring the man?* They could not present him, as Jeroboam's wife did Ahijah, with loaves and cakes (1 Kings xiv. 3), for their bread was spent; but the servant bethought himself that he had in his pocket the fourth part of a shekel, about seven-pence halfpenny in value, and *that he would give to the man of God to direct them*, v. 8. "That will do," says Saul; "*let us go*," v. 10. Some think that when Saul talked of giving Samuel a fee he measured him by himself, or by his sons, as if he must be hired to do an honest Israelite a kindness, and was like the false prophets, that *divined for money*, Mic. iii. 11. He came to him as a fortune-teller, rather than as a prophet, and therefore thought the fourth part of a shekel was enough to give him. But it rather seems to be agreeable to the general usage of those times, as it is to natural equity, that those who sowed spiritual things should reap not only eternal things from him that employs them, but temporal things from those for whom they are employed. Samuel needed not their money, nor would he have denied them his advice if they had not brought it (it is probable, when he had it, he gave it to the poor); but they brought it to him as a token of their respect and the value they put upon his office; nor did he refuse it, for they were able to give it, and, though it was but little, it was the widow's mite. But Saul, as he never thought of going to the man of God till the servant proposed it, so, it should seem, he mentioned the want of a present as an objection against their going; he would not own that he had money in his pocket, but, when the servant generously offered to be at the charge, then, "Well said," says Saul; "come, let us go." Most people love a cheap religion, and like it best when they can devolve the expense of it on others. (5.) The historian here takes notice of the name then given to the prophets: they called them *Seers*, or *seeing men* (r. 9), not but that the name *prophet* was then used, and applied to such persons, but that of seers was more in use. Note, Those that are prophets must first be seers; those who undertake to speak to others of the things of God must have an insight into those things themselves.

11 *And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?* 12 *And they*



answered them, and said, He is; behold, *he is* before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for *there is* a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place: 13 As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; *and* afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him. 14 And they went up into the city: *and* when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place. 15 Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, 16 To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him *to be* captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. 17 And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.

Here, I. Saul, by an ordinary enquiry, is directed to Samuel, v. 11—14. Gibeah of Saul was not twenty miles from Ramah where Samuel dwelt, and was near to Mizpeh where he often judged Israel, and yet, it seems, Saul had lived so very privately, and had taken so little notice of public affairs, that he had never seen Samuel, for when he met him (v. 18) he did not know him, so that there was no cause to suspect any secret compact or collusion between them in this matter. *I knew him not*, says John Baptist concerning Christ, John i. 31. Yet I do not think it any commendation to Saul that he was a stranger to Samuel. However,

1. The maid-servants of Ramah, whom they met with at the places of drawing water, could give him and his servant intelligence concerning Samuel; and very particular they were in their directions, v. 12, 13. We should always be ready to give what assistance we can to those that are enquiring after God's prophets, and to further them in their enquiries. Even the maid-servants could tell them, (1.) That there was a sacrifice that day in the high place, it being either an ordinary festival or an extraordinary day of

prayer and thanksgiving, with which sacrifices were joined. The tabernacle being deprived of the ark, the altar there had not now the reputation it formerly had, nor were they confined to it, as they would be when God had again chosen a place to put his name in; and therefore now other places were allowed. Samuel had built an altar at Ramah (*ch. vii. 17*), and here we have him making use of that altar. (2.) That Samuel came that day to the city, either from his circuit or from his country seat. He was such a public person that his movements were generally known. (3.) That this was just the time of their meeting to feast before the Lord upon the sacrifice: "About this time you will find him in the street going up to the high place." They knew the hour of the solemn feast. (4.) That the people would not eat till Samuel came, not only because he was the worthiest person, and they ought in good manners to stay for him, and he was, as some think, the maker of this feast, the sacrifice being offered at his charge and upon his account; but because, as a man of God, whoever made the feast, *he* must bless the sacrifice, that is, those parts of the sacrifice which they feasted upon, which may be considered, [1.] As a common meal, and so this is an instance of the great duty of craving a blessing upon our meat before we partake of it. We cannot expect benefit from our food without that blessing, and we have no reason to expect that blessing if we do not pray for it. Thus we must give glory to God as our benefactor, and own our dependence upon him and our obligations to him. Or, [2.] As a religious assembly. When the sacrifice was offered, which was the ceremony, Samuel blessed it, that is, he prayed over it, and offered up spiritual sacrifices with it, which were the substance; and afterwards, when the holy duties were performed, they did eat. Let the soul first be served. The feast upon the sacrifice being a sacred rite, it was requisite that it should in a particular manner be blessed, as is the Christian eucharist. They feasted in token of their reconciliation to God by virtue of the sacrifice, and their participation of the benefits of it; and Samuel blessed the feast, that is, he prayed to God to grace the solemnity with his special presence, that it might answer those great ends. Bishop Hall observes what a particular account those maid-servants could give of the usages of those sacred feasts, and infers from it that, "where there is the practice and example of piety in the better sort, there will be a reflection of it upon the meanest. It is no small advantage to live in religious places; for we shall be much to blame if all goodness fall beside us."

2. Saul and his servant followed the directions given them, and very opportunely met Samuel going to the high place, the synagogue of the city, v. 14. This seemed purely accidental, but the divine providence ordered

it for the forwarding of this great event. The wise God serves very great and certain purposes by very small and casual occurrences. A sparrow falls not to the ground without our Father.

11. Samuel, by an extraordinary revelation, is informed concerning Saul. He was a seer, and therefore must see this in a way peculiar to himself.

1. God had told him, the day before, that he would, at this time, send him the man that should serve the people of Israel for such a king as they wished to have, *like all the nations*, v. 15, 16. He told him in his ear, that is, privately, by a secret whisper to his mind, or perhaps by a still small voice, some soft and gentle sounds conveyed to his ear, probably when he was praying in secret for direction in that and other affairs of the nation. He had spoken in the ears of the Lord (ch. viii. 21), and now God spoke in his ear, in token of friendship and familiarity, for he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets, as secrets in their ear, Amos iii. 7. God told him before, that it might not be a surprise to him; and perhaps it was in expectation of it that he appointed the feast and the sacrifice, for the imploring of God's blessing upon this great and important affair, though he might keep the particular occasion in his own breast, God having only told it to him in his ear. The Hebrew phrase is, *He uncovered the ear of Samuel*, to which some allude for the explication of the way of God's revealing himself to us; he not only speaks, but *uncovers our ear*. We have naturally a covering on our ears, so that we perceive not what God says (Job xxxiii. 14), but, when God will manifest himself to a soul, he uncovers the ear, says, *Ephphatha, Be opened*; he takes the veil from off the heart, 2 Cor. iii. 16. Though God had, in displeasure, granted their request for a king, yet here he speaks tenderly of Israel; for even in wrath he remembers mercy. (1.) He calls them again and again his people; though a peevish and provoking people, yet mine still. (2.) He sends them a man to be captain over them, that they might not be a body without a head, and to save them out of the hand of the Philistines, which perhaps was more than many of them aimed at in desiring a king. (3.) He does it with a gracious respect to them and to their cry: *I have looked upon my people, and their cry has come unto me*. He gratified them with what they cried for, as the tender mother humours the froward child, lest it should break its heart. And (as bishop Patrick observes), though he would not hear their cry to relieve them against the oppression of their kings (ch. viii. 18), yet he was so gracious as to make those kings instruments of their deliverance from the oppression of their neighbours, which was more than they had reason to expect.

2. When Saul came up towards him in the street God again whispered Samuel in

the ear (v. 17): *Behold the man whom I spoke to thee of!* Saul being a man of unusual stature, it is natural to think that Samuel fixed his eye upon him at a distance, and perhaps looked the more wistfully towards him because the hour had now come when God would send him the man that should be king of Israel, and he fancied this might be he; but, that he might be fully satisfied, God told him expressly, *That is the man that shall restrain* (for magistrates are heirs of restraint) *my people Israel*.

18 Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. 19 And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. 20 And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? 21 And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? 22 And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. 23 And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. 24 And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. 25 And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. 26 And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul

arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. 27 And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may show thee the word of God.

Providence having at length brought Samuel and Saul together, we have here an account of what passed between them in the gate, at the feast, and in private.

I. In the gate of the city; passing through that, Saul found him (v. 18), and, little thinking that he was Samuel himself, asked him the way to Samuel's house: *Tell me where the seer's house is;* for there he expected to find him. See how mean a figure Samuel made, though so great a man: he took not any state, had no attendants, no ensigns of honour carried before him, nor any distinguishing habit, no, not when he went to church, but appeared, in all respects, so much a common person that Saul, though he was told he should meet him, never suspected that it was he, but, as if he looked more like a porter than a prophet, asked him the way to the seer's house. Thus is great worth oftentimes hidden under a very despicable appearance. Samuel knew that it was not the house, but the man, that he wanted, and therefore answered him, "*I am the seer, the person you enquire for,*" v. 19. Samuel knew him before he knew Samuel; thus, though all that are called to the kingdom of glory are brought to know God, yet first they were known of him, Gal. iv. 9. Now, 1. Samuel obliges him to stay with him till the next day. The greatest part of this day had been spent in sacrificing, and the rest of it was to be spent in holy feasting, and therefore, "*To-morrow I will let thee go, and not sooner; now go up before me to the high place; let us pray together, and then we will talk together.*" Saul had nothing in his mind but to find his asses, but Samuel would take him off from that care, and dispose him to the exercises of piety; and therefore bids him go to the high place, and go before him, because, it may be, some business obliged Samuel to call by the way. 2. He satisfies him about his asses (v. 20): *Set not thy mind on them, be not in further care about them; they are found.* By this Saul might perceive that he was a prophet, that he could give him an answer to the enquiry which he had not yet made, and tell him what he thought; and thence he might infer, if a man of God can do this, much more doth God himself understand our thoughts afar off. 3. He surprises him with an intimation of preferment before him: "*On whom is all the desire of Israel?* Is it not a king that they are set upon, and there is never a man in Israel that will suit them as thou wilt." It

does not appear that the country had as yet any eye upon him for the government, because they had left it wholly to God to choose for them; but such a one as he they wished for, and his advancement would be the advancement of his family and relations, as Abner, and others. 4. To this strange intimation Saul returns a very modest answer, v. 21. Samuel, he thought, did but banter him, because he was a tall man, but a very unlikely man to be a king; for, though the historian says (v. 1) his father was a *mighty man of power*, yet he himself speaks diminishingly of his tribe and family. "Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's sons, when grown up to be a man, was called a *little one* (Gen. xlv. 20); that tribe was diminished by the war of Gibeah; and *I am a Benjamite, my family the least,*" probably a younger house, not in any place of honour or trust, no, not in their own tribe. Gideon had expressed himself thus, Judg. vi. 15. A humble disposition is a good presage of preferment.

II. At the public feast; thither Samuel took him and his servant. Though the advancement of Saul would be the deposing of Samuel, yet that good prophet was so far from envying him, or bearing him any ill-will for it, that he was the first and forwardest man to do him honour, in compliance with the will of God. If this be the man whom God has chosen, though he be none of Samuel's particular friends or confidants, yet he is heartily welcome to his table, nay, to his bosom. We may suppose it was no unseasonable kindness to Saul to give him a meal's meat, for it seems, by what he said (v. 7), that all their meat and money were spent. But this was not all. Samuel treats him not as a common person, but a person of quality and distinction, to prepare both him and the people for what was to follow. Two marks of honour he put upon him:—1. He set him in the best place, as more honourable than any other of the guests, to whom he said, *Give this man place,* Luke xiv. 9. Though we may suppose the magistrates were there, who in their own city would claim precedence, yet the master of the feast made Saul and his servant too (who, if Saul was a king, must be respected as his prime minister of state) *sit in the chief place,* v. 22. Note, Civil respects must be paid to those who in civil things have the precedence given them by the divine providence. 2. He presented him with the best dish, which, having had notice from heaven the day before of his coming (v. 16), he had designed for him, and ordered the cook to secure for him, when he gave orders for inviting the guests and making preparation for them. And what should this precious dish be, which was so very carefully reserved for the king-elect? One would expect it should be something very nice and delicate. No, it was a plain shoulder of mutton (v. 23, 24) The right shoulder of the peace-offerings was

to be given to the priests, who were God's receivers (Lev. vii. 32); the next in honour to that was the left shoulder, which probably was always allotted to those that sat at the upper end of the table, and was wont to be Samuel's mess at other times; so that his giving it to Saul now was an implicit resignation of his place to him. Some observe a significancy in this dish. The shoulder denotes strength, and the breast, which some think went with it, denotes affection: he that was king had *the government upon his shoulder*, for he must bear the weight of it; and the people in his bosom, for they must be dear to him.

III. What passed between them in private. Both that evening and early the next morning Samuel communed with Saul upon the flat roof of the house, r. 25, 26. We may suppose Samuel now told him the whole story of the people's desire of a king, the grounds of their desire, and God's grant of it, to all which Saul, living very privately, was perhaps a stranger; he satisfied him that he was the person God had pitched upon for the government; and whereas Saul would object that Samuel was in possession, and he would not for all the world take it out of his hands, Samuel, we may suppose, gave him all the assurance he could desire of his willingness to resign. Early in the morning he sent him towards home, brought him part of the way, bade him send his servant before, that they might be private (r. 27), and there, as we find in the beginning of the next chapter, he anointed him, and therein showed him *the word of the Lord*, that is, gave him full satisfaction that he was the person chosen to be king, for he would not jest with that sacred rite. It is by the *unction of the Holy Ghost* that Christ, the great prophet, *shows us the word of the Lord*. 1 John ii. 27, *the same anointing teacheth you of all things.*

## CHAP. X.

We left Samuel and Saul walking together, probably some private way over the fields down from Ramah, perhaps in the paths of the vineyards, and Saul expecting to hear from Samuel the word of God. Now here we have, I. The anointing of Saul then and there, ver. 1. The sign Samuel gave him, ver. 2-6. And instructions, ver. 7-8. II. The accomplishment of those signs to the satisfaction of Saul, ver. 9-13. III. His return to his father's house, ver. 14-16. IV. His public election by lot, and solemn inauguration, ver. 17-25. V. His return to his own city, ver. 26, 27. It is a great work that is here a doing, the setting up not only of a monarch, but of monarchy itself, in Israel; and therefore in all the advances towards it much of God is seen.

**T**HEN Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?* 2 When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found:

and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son? 3 Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Beth-el, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: 4 And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands. 5 After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: 6 And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. 7 And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee. 8 And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do.

Samuel is here executing the office of a prophet, giving Saul full assurance from God that he should be king, as he was afterwards, according to these prophecies which went before of him.

I. He *anointed him and kissed him*, r. 1. This was not done in a solemn assembly, but it was done by divine appointment, which made up the want of all external solemnities, nor was it ever the less valid for its being done in private, under a hedge, or, as the Jews says, by a fountain. God's institutions are great and honourable, though the circumstances of their administration be ever so mean and despicable. 1. Samuel, by anointing Saul, assured him that it was God's act to make him king: *Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee?* And, in token of that, the high priest was anointed to his office, to signify the conferring of those gifts upon him that were requisite for the discharge of its duties, and the same was intimated in the anointing of kings; for whom God calls he

qualifies, and suitable qualifications furnish good proof of a commission. These sacred unctions, then used, pointed at the great Messiah, or anointed one, the king of the church, and high priest of our profession, who was anointed with the oil of the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure, and above all the priests and princes of the Jewish church. It was common oil, no doubt, which Samuel used, and we read not of his blessing it or praying over it. But it was only a vial of oil that he anointed him with, the vessel brittle, because his kingdom would soon be cracked and broken, and the quantity small, because he had but little of the Spirit conferred upon him to what David had, who was therefore anointed with a horn of oil, as were Solomon and Jehu with a box of oil. 2. By kissing him, he assured him of his own approbation of the choice, not only his consent to it, but his complacency in it, though it abridged his power and eclipsed his glory and the glory of his family. "God has anointed thee," says Samuel, "to be king, and I am satisfied and very well pleased, in pledge of which take this kiss." It was likewise a kiss of homage and allegiance; hereby he not only owns him to be king, but his king, and in this sense we are commanded to kiss the Son, Ps. ii. 12. God has anointed him, and therefore we must thus acknowledge him and do homage to him. In Samuel's explication of the ceremony, he reminds him, (1.) Of the nature of the government to which he is called. He was anointed to be a captain, a commander indeed, which bespeaks honour and power, but a commander in war, which bespeaks care, and toil, and danger. (2.) Of the origin of it: *The Lord hath anointed thee.* By him he ruled, and therefore must rule for him, in dependence on him, and with an eye to his glory. (3.) Of the end of it. It is over his inheritance, to take care of that, protect it, and order all the affairs of it for the best, as a steward whom a great man sets over his estate, to manage it for his service and give an account of it to him.

II. For his further satisfaction he gives him some signs, which should come to pass immediately, this very day; and they were such as would not only confirm the word of Samuel in general, and prove him a true prophet, but would confirm this word to Saul in particular, that he should be king.

1. He should presently meet with some that would bring him intelligence from home of the care his father's house was in concerning him, v. 2. These he would meet hard by Rachel's sepulchre. The first place Samuel directed him to was a sepulchre, the sepulchre of one of his ancestors, for Rachel died in travail with Benjamin; there he must read a lecture of his own mortality, and now that he had a crown in his eye must think of his grave, in which all his honour would be laid in the dust. Here two men would meet

him, perhaps sent on purpose to look after him, and would tell him the asses were found, and his father was in pain concerning him, saying, *What shall I do for my son?* He would reckon it happened well that he met with these messengers; and it is good to eye Providence in favourable conjunctures (though the matter be minute) and to be encouraged to trust it in greater matters. 2. He should next meet with others going to Bethel, where, it should seem, there was a high place for religious worship, and these men were bringing their sacrifices thither, v. 3, 4. It was a token for good to one that was designed for the government of Israel, wherever he came, to meet with people going to worship God. It is supposed that those kids and loaves, and the bottle of wine which the three men had with them, were designed for sacrifice, with the meat-offerings and drink-offerings that were to attend the sacrifice; yet Samuel tells Saul that they will give him two of their loaves, and he must take them. Such a present would look to us now like the relieving of a beggar. Saul must hereafter remember the time when he received alms, and must therefore be humble and charitable to the poor. But perhaps it would then be construed a fit present for a prince; and, as such, Saul must receive it, the first present that was brought to him, by such as knew not what they did, nor why they did it, but God put it into their hearts, which made it the more fit to be a sign to him. These two loaves, which were the first tribute paid to this newly-anointed king, might serve for an admonition to him not to spend the wealth of his crown in luxury, but still to be content with plain food. Bread is the staff of life. 3. The most remarkable sign of all would be his joining with a company of prophets that he should meet with, under the influence of a spirit of prophecy, which should at that time come upon him. What God works in us by his Spirit serves much more for the confirming of faith than any thing wrought for us by his providence. He here (v. 5, 6) tells him, (1.) Where this would happen: *At the hill of God*, where there was a garrison of the Philistines, which is supposed to be near Gibeah, his own city, for there was the Philistines' garrison, ch. xiii. 3. Perhaps it was one of the articles of Samuel's agreement with them that they should have a garrison there, or, rather, after they were subdued in the beginning of his time they got ground again, so far as to force this garrison into that place, and thence God raised up the man that should chastise them. There was a place that was called the *hill of God*, because of one of the schools of the prophets built upon it; and such respect did even Philistines themselves pay to religion that a garrison of their soldiers suffered a school of God's prophets to live peaceably by them, and did not only not dislodge them, but not restrain nor

disturb the public exercises of their devotion. (2.) Upon what occasion; he should meet a *company of prophets with music before them, prophesying*, and with them he should join himself. These prophets were not (as it should seem) divinely inspired to foretel things to come, nor did God reveal himself to them by dreams and visions, but they employed themselves in the study of the law, in instructing their neighbours, and in the acts of piety, especially in praising God, wherein they were wonderfully assisted and enlarged by the Spirit of God. It was happy for Israel that they had not only prophets, but companies of prophets, who gave them good instructions and set them good examples, and helped very much to keep up religion among them. Now the word of the Lord was not precious, as it had been when Samuel was first raised up, who had been instrumental in founding these colleges, or religious houses, whence, it is probable, the synagogues took their rise. What a pity was it that Israel should be weary of the government of such a man, who though he had not, as a man of war, expelled the Philistines, yet (which was a greater kindness to Israel) had, as a man of God, settled the schools of the prophets! Music was then used as a proper means to dispose the mind to receive the impressions of the good Spirit, as it did Elisha's, 2 Kings iii. 15. But we have no reason to look for the same benefit by it now, unless we saw it as effectual as it was then in Saul's case, to drive away the evil spirit. These prophets had been at the high place, probably offering sacrifice, and now they came back singing psalms. We should come from holy ordinances with our hearts greatly enlarged in holy joy and praise. See Ps. cxxxviii. 5. Saul should find himself strongly moved to join with them, and should be turned thereby *into another man* from what he had been while he lived in a private capacity. The Spirit of God, by his ordinances, changes men, wonderfully transforms them; Saul, by praising God in the communion of saints, became another man, but whether a new man or no may be questioned.

III. He directs him to proceed in the administration of his government as Providence should lead him, and as Samuel should advise him. 1. He must follow Providence in ordinary cases (v. 7): "*Do as occasion shall serve thee.*" Take such measures as thy own prudence shall direct thee." But, 2. In an extraordinary strait that would hereafter befall him at Gilgal, and would be the most critical juncture of all, when he would have special need of divine aids, he must wait for Samuel to come to him, and must tarry *seven days* in expectation of him, v. 8. How his failing in this matter proved his fall we find afterwards, ch. xiii. 11. It was now a plain intimation to him that he was upon his good behaviour, and, though a

king, must act under the direction of Samuel, and do as he should order him. The greatest of men must own themselves in subjection to God and his word.

9 And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day. 10 And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. 11 And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, *What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?* 12 And one of the same place answered and said, *But who is their father?* Therefore it became a proverb, *Is Saul also among the prophets?* 13 And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place. 14 And Saul's uncle said unto him and unto his servant, *Whither went ye?* And he said, *To seek the asses:* and when we saw that *they were* no where, we came to Samuel. 15 And Saul's uncle said, *Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you.* 16 And Saul said unto his uncle, *He told us plainly that the asses were found.* But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not.

Saul has now taken his leave of Samuel, much amazed, we may well suppose, at what has been done to him, almost ready to question whether he be awake or no, and whether it be not all a dream. Now here we are told,

I. What occurred by the way, v. 9. Those signs which Samuel had given him came to pass very punctually; but that which gave him the greatest satisfaction of all was this, he found immediately that God had given him *another heart*. A new fire was kindled in his breast, such as he had never before been acquainted with: seeking the asses is quite out of his mind, and he thinks of nothing but fighting the Philistines, redressing the grievances of Israel, making laws, administering justice, and providing for the public safety; these are the things that now fill his head. He finds himself raised to such a pitch of boldness and bravery as he never thought he should be conscious of. He

has no longer the heart of a husbandman, which is low, and mean, and narrow, and concerned only about his corn and cattle; but the heart of a statesman, a general, a prince. Whom God calls to any service he will make fit for it. If he advance to another station, he will give another heart, to those who sincerely desire to serve him with their power.

II. What occurred when he came near home. They came to *the hill* (v. 10), that is, to *Gibeah*, or *Geba*, which signifies a hill, and so the Chaldee here takes it as a proper name; he met with the prophets as Samuel had told him, and the Spirit of God came upon him, strongly and suddenly (so the word signifies), but not so as to rest and abide upon him. It came on so as to go off quickly. However, for the present, it had a strange effect upon him; for he immediately joined with the prophets in their devotion, and that with as much decorum and as great a transport of affection as any of them: *He prophesied among them.* Now,

1. His prophesying was publicly taken notice of, v. 11, 12. He was now among his acquaintance, who, when they saw him among the prophets, called one another to come and see a strange sight. This would prepare them to accept him as a king, though one of themselves, when they had seen how God had advanced him to the honour of a prophet. The seventy elders prophesied before they were made judges, Num. xi. 25. Now, (1.) They all wondered to see Saul among the prophets: *What is this that has come to the son of Kish?* Though this school of the prophets was near his father's house, yet he had never associated with them, nor shown them any respect, perhaps had sometimes spoken slightly of them; and now to see him prophesying among them was a surpris to them, as it was long after when his namesake, in the New Testament, preached that gospel which he had before persecuted, Acts ix. 21. Where God gives another heart it will soon show itself. (2.) One of them, that was wiser than the rest, asked, *Who is their father*, or instructor? Is it not God? Are they not all taught of him? Do they not all owe their gifts to him? And is he limited? Cannot he make Saul a prophet, as well as any of them, if he please? Or, *Is not Samuel their father?* Under God, he was so; and Saul had now lately been with him, which, by his servant, he might know. No marvel for him to prophesy who lay last night under Samuel's roof. (3.) It became a proverb, commonly used in Israel, when they would express their wonder at a bad man's either becoming good, or at least being found in good company, *Is Saul among the prophets?* Note, Saul among the prophets is a wonder to a proverb. Let not the worst be despaired of, yet let not an external show of devotion, and a sudden change for the present, be too

much relied on; for Saul among the prophets was Saul still.

2. His being anointed was kept private. When he had done prophesying, (1.) It should seem he uttered all his words before the Lord, and recommended the affair to his favour, for he went straight to *the high place* (v. 13), to give God thanks for his mercies to him and to pray for the continuance of those mercies. But, (2.) He industriously concealed from his relations what had passed. His uncle, who met with him either at the high place or as soon as he came home, examined him, v. 14. Saul owned, for his servant knew it, that they had been with Samuel, and that he told them the asses were found, but said not a word of *the kingdom*, v. 14, 15. This was an instance, [1.] Of his humility. Many a one would have been so elated with this surprising elevation as to proclaim it upon the house-top. But Saul, though he might please himself with it in his own breast, did not pride himself in it among his neighbours. The heirs of the kingdom of glory are well enough pleased that *the world knows them not*, 1 John iii. 1. [2.] Of his prudence. Had he been forward to proclaim it, he would have been envied, and he knew not what difficulty that might have created him. Samuel had communicated it to him as a secret, and he knows how to keep counsel. Thus it appears that he had another heart, a heart fit for government. [3.] Of his dependence upon God. He does not go about to make an interest for himself, but leaves it to God to carry on his own work by Samuel, and, for his own part, sits still, to see how the matter will fall.

17 And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh; 18 And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: 19 And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, *Nay*, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20 And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21 When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when

they sought him, he could not be found. 22 Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. 23 And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. 24 And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that *there is none like him among all the people?* And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. 25 Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote *it* in a book, and laid *it* up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. 26 And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. 27 But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.

Saul's nomination to the throne is here made public, in a general assembly of the elders of Israel, the representatives of their respective tribes at Mizpeh. It is probable that this convention of the states was called as soon as conveniently it might, after Saul was anointed, for, if there must be a change in their government, the sooner the better: it might be of bad consequence to be long in the doing. The people having met in a solemn assembly, in which God was in a peculiar manner present (and therefore it is said they were *called together unto the Lord*, v. 17). Samuel acts for God among them.

I. He reproves them for casting off the government of a prophet, and desiring that of a captain. 1. He shows them (v. 18) how happy they had been under the divine government; when God ruled them, he *delivered them out of the hand of those that oppressed them*, and what would they desire more? Could the mightiest man of valour do that for them which the Almighty God had done? 2. He likewise shows them (v. 19) what an affront they had put upon God (who had himself saved them *out of all their tribulations*, by his own power, and by such as he had immediately called and qualified) in desiring a king to save them. He tells them in plain terms, "*You have this day rejected your God*; you have in effect done it: so he construes it, and he might justly, for your so

doing, reject you." Those that can live better by sense than by faith, that stay themselves upon an arm of flesh rather than upon the almighty arm, forsake a fountain of living waters for broken cisterns. And some make their obstinacy in this matter to be a presage of their rejecting Christ, in casting off whom they cast off God, that he should not reign over them.

II. He puts them upon choosing their king by lot. He knew whom God had chosen, and had already anointed him, but he knew also the peevishness of that people, and that there were those among them who would not acquiesce in the choice if it depended upon his single testimony; and therefore, that every tribe and every family of the chosen tribe might please themselves with having a chance for it, he calls them to the lot, v. 19. Benjamin is taken out of all the tribes (v. 20), and out of that tribe Saul the son of Kish, v. 21. By this method it would appear to the people, as it already appeared to Samuel, that Saul was appointed of God to be king; for *the disposal of the lot is of the Lord*. It would also prevent all disputes and exceptions; for *the lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty*. When the tribe of Benjamin was taken, they might easily foresee that they were setting up a family that would soon be put down again; for dying Jacob had, by the spirit of prophecy, entailed the dominion upon Judah. Judah is the tribe that must *rule as a lion*; Benjamin shall only *ravin as a wolf*, Gen. xlix. 10, 27. Those therefore that knew the scriptures could not be very fond of the doing of that which they foresaw must, ere long, be undone again.

III. It is with much ado, and not without further enquiries of the Lord, that Saul is at length produced. When the lot fell upon him, every one expected he should answer to his name at the first call, but, instead of that, none of his friends could find him (v. 21), he had *hidden himself among the stuff* (v. 22), so little fond was he now of that power which yet, when he was in possession of, he could not without the utmost indignation think of parting with.

1. He withdrew, in hopes that, upon his not appearing, they would proceed to another choice, or thus to express his modesty; for, by what had already passed, he knew he must be the man. We may suppose he was at this time really averse to take upon him the government, (1.) Because he was conscious to himself of unfitness for so great a trust. He had not been bred up to books, or arms, or courts, and feared he should be guilty of some fatal blunder. (2.) Because it would expose him to the envy of his neighbours that were ill-affected towards him. (3.) Because he understood, by what Samuel had said, that the people sinned in asking a king, and it was in anger that God granted their request. (4.) Because the affairs of Israel



were at this time in a bad posture; the Philistines were strong, the Ammonites threatening; and he must be bold indeed that will set sail in a storm.

2. But the congregation, believing that choice well made which God himself made, would leave no way untried to find him out on whom the lot fell. *They enquired of the Lord*, either by the high priest, and his breast-plate of judgment, or by Samuel, and his spirit of prophecy; and the Lord directed them where they should find him, hidden among the carriages, and thence *they fetched him*, v. 23. Note, None will be losers at last by their humility and modesty. Honour, like the shadow, follows those that flee from it, but flees from those that pursue it.

IV. Samuel presents him to the people, and they accept him. He needed not to mount the bench, or scaffold, to be seen; when he stood upon even ground with the rest he was seen above them all, for he was taller than any of them *by head and shoulders*, v. 23. "Look you," said Samuel, "what a king God has chosen for you, just such a one as you wished for; *there is none like him among all the people*, that has so much majesty in his countenance and such a graceful stateliness in his mien; he is in the crowd like a cedar among the shrubs. Let your own eyes be judges, is he not a brave and gallant man?" The people hereupon signified their approbation of the choice, and their acceptance of him; they *shouted and said, Let the king live*, that is, "Let him long reign over us in health and prosperity." Subjects were wont to testify their affection and allegiance to their prince by their good wishes, and those turned (as our translation does this) into addresses to God. Ps. lxxii. 15, *Prayer shall be made for him continually*. See Ps. xx. 1. Samuel had told them they would soon be weary of their king, but, in the mind they are now in, they will never be so: *Let the king live*.

V. Samuel settles the original contract between them, and leaves it upon record, v. 25. He had before told them *the manner of the king* (ch. viii. 11), how he would abuse his power; now he tells them *the manner of the kingdom*, or rather the law, or judgment, or constitution, of it, what power the prince might challenge and the utmost of the property the subject might claim. He fixed the land-marks between them, that neither might encroach upon the other. Let them rightly understand one another at first, and let the agreement remain in black and white, which will tend to preserve a good understanding between them ever after. The learned bishop Patrick thinks he now repeated and registered what he had told them (ch. viii. 11) of the arbitrary power their kings would assume, that it might hereafter be a witness against them that they had drawn the calamity upon themselves, for they were warned what it would come to and yet they would have a king.

VI. The convention was dissolved when the solemnity was over: *Samuel sent every man to his house*. Here were no votes passed, nor, for aught that appears, so much as a motion made, for the raising of money to support the dignity of their new-elected king; if therefore he afterwards thinks fit to take what they do not think fit to give (which yet it was necessary that he should have), they must thank themselves. They went every man to his house, pleased with the name of a king over them, and *Saul also went home to Gibeah*, to his father's house, not puffed up with the name of a kingdom under him. At Gibeah he had no palace, no throne, no court, yet thither he goes. If he must be a king, as one mindful of the rock out of which he was hewn, he will make his own city the royal city, nor will he be ashamed (as too many are when they are preferred) of his mean relations. Such a humble spirit as this puts a beauty and lustre upon great advancements. The condition rising, and the mind not rising with it, behold how good and pleasant it is! But,

1. How did the people stand affected to their new king? The generality of them, it should seem, did not show themselves much concerned: *They went every man to his own house*. Their own domestic affairs lay nearer their hearts than any interests of the public; this was the general temper. But, (1.) There were some so faithful as to attend him: *A band of men whose hearts God had touched*, v. 26. Not the body of the people, but a small company, who because they were fond of their own choice of a king, or because they had so much more sense than their neighbours as to conclude that if he was a king he ought to be respected accordingly, went with him to Gibeah, as his life-guard. They were those *whose hearts God had touched*, in this instance, to do their duty. Note, Whatever good there is in us, or is done by us, at any time, it must be ascribed to the grace of God. If the heart bend at any time the right way, it is because he has touched it. One touch is enough, when it is divine. (2.) There were others so spiteful as to affront him; children of Belial, men that would endure no yoke, that would be pleased with nothing that either God or Samuel did; they *despised him* (v. 27) for the meanness of his tribe and family, the smallness of his estate, and the privacy of his education; and they said, *How shall this man save us?* Yet they did not propose any man more likely; nor, whomsoever they had, must their salvation come from the man, but from God. They would not join with their neighbours in testifying an affection to him and his government, by bringing him presents, or addressing him upon his accession to the crown. Perhaps those discontented spirits were most earnest for a king, and yet, now that they had one, they quarrelled with him, because he was not altogether such a one as themselves. It

was reason enough for them not to like him because others did. Thus differently are men affected to our exalted Redeemer. God hath set him king upon the holy hill of Sion. There is a remnant that submit to him, rejoice in him, bring him presents, and follow him wherever he goes; and they are those *whose hearts God has touched*, whom he has *made willing in the day of his power*. But there are others who despise him, who ask, *How shall this man save us?* They are offended in him, stumble at his external meanness, and they will be broken by it.

2. How did Saul resent the bad conduct of those that were disaffected to his government? *He held his peace*. Margin, *He was as though he had been deaf*. He was so far from resenting it that he seemed not to take notice of it, which was an evidence of his humility and modesty, and the mercifulness of his disposition, and also that he was well satisfied with his title to the crown; for those are commonly most jealous of their honour, and most revengeful of affronts, that gain their power by improper means. Christ held his peace when he was affronted, for it was the day of his patience; but there is a day of recompence coming.

CHAP. XI.

In this chapter we have the first-fruits of Saul's government, in the glorious rescue of Jabesh-Gilead out of the hands of the Ammonites. Let not Israel thence infer that therefore they did well to ask a king (God could and would have saved them without one); but let them admire God's goodness, that he did not reject them, when they rejected him, and acknowledge his wisdom in the choice of the person whom, if he did not find fit, yet he made fit, for the great trust he called him to, and enabled, in some measure, to merit the crown by his public services, before it was fixed on his head by the public approbation. Here is, I. The great extremity to which the city of Jabesh-Gilead, on the other side of Jordan, was reduced by the Ammonites, ver. 1-3. II. Saul's great readiness to come to their relief, whereby he signalized himself, ver. 4-10. III. The good success of his attempt, by which God signalized him, ver. 11. IV. Saul's tenderness, notwithstanding this, towards those that had opposed him, ver. 12, 13. V. The public confirmation and recognition of his election to the government, ver. 14, 15.

**T**HEN Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. 2 And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this *condition* will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel. 3 And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if *there be* no man to save us, we will come out to thee. 4 Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept.

The Ammonites were bad neighbours to those tribes of Israel that lay next them,

though descendants from just Lot, and, for that reason, dealt civilly with by Israel. See Deut. ii. 19. Jephthah, in his time, had humbled them, but now the sin of Israel had put them into a capacity to make head again, and avenge that quarrel. The city of Jabesh-Gilead had been, some ages ago, destroyed by Israel's sword of justice, for not appearing against the wickedness of Gibeah (Judges xxi. 10); and now being replenished again, probably by the posterity of those that then escaped the sword, it is in danger of being destroyed by the Ammonites, as if some bad fate attended the place. Nahash, king of Ammon (1 Chron. xix. 1), laid siege to it. Now here,

I. The besieged beat a parley (v. 1): "*Make a covenant with us, and we will surrender upon terms, and serve thee.*" They had lost the virtue of Israelites, else they would not have thus lost the valour of Israelites, nor tamely yielded to serve an Ammonite, without one bold struggle for themselves. Had they not broken their covenant with God, and forsaken his service, they needed not thus to have courted a covenant with a Gentile nation, and offered themselves to serve them.

II. The besiegers offer them base and barbarous conditions: they will spare their lives, and take them to be their servants, upon condition that they shall *put out their right eyes*, v. 2. The Gileadites were content to part with their liberty and estates for the ransom of their blood; and, had the Ammonites taken them at their word, the matter would have been so settled immediately, and the Gileadites would not have sent out for relief. But their abject concessions make the Ammonites more insolent in their demands, and they cannot be content to have them for their servants, but, 1. They must torment them, and put them to pain, exquisite pain, for so the thrusting out of an eye would do. 2. They must disable them for war, and render them incapable, though not of labour (that would have been a loss to their lords), yet of bearing arms; for in those times they fought with shields in their left hands, which covered their left eye, so that a soldier without his right eye was in effect blind. 3. They must put a *reproach upon all Israel*, as weak and cowardly, that would suffer the inhabitants of one of their chief cities to be thus miserably used, and not offer to rescue them.

III. The besieged desire, and obtain, seven days' time to consider of this proposal, v. 3. If Nahash had not granted them this respite, we may suppose the horror of the proposal would have made them desperate, and they would rather have died with their swords in their hands than have surrendered to such merciless enemies: therefore Nahash, not imagining it possible that, in so short a time, they should have relief, and being very secure of the advantages he

thought he had against them, in a bravado gave them seven days, that the reproach upon Israel, for not rescuing them, might be the greater, and his triumphs the more illustrious. But there was a providence in it, that his security might be his infatuation and ruin.

IV. Notice is sent of this to Gibeah. They said they would send messengers to all the coasts of Israel (v. 3), which made Nahash the more secure, for that, he thought, would be a work of time, and none would be forward to appear if they had not one common head; and perhaps Nabash had not yet heard of the new-elected king. But the messengers, either of their own accord or by order from their masters, went straight to Gibeah, and, not finding Saul within, told their news to the people, who fell a weeping upon hearing it, v. 4. They would sooner lament their brethren's misery and danger than think of helping them, shed their tears for them than shed their blood. They wept, as despairing to help the men of Jabesh-Gilead, and fearing lest, if that frontier-city should be lost, the enemy would penetrate into the very bowels of their country, which now appeared in great hazard.

5 And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What *aileth* the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. 6 And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly. 7 And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent *them* throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. 8 And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. 9 And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, To-morrow, by *that time* the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and showed *it* to the men of Jabesh; and they were glad. 10 Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To-morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you. 11 And it was *so* on the morrow, that Saul put

the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together.

What is here related turns very much to the honour of Saul, and shows the happy fruits of that other spirit with which he was endued. Observe here,

I. His humility. Though he was anointed king, and accepted by his people, yet he did not think it below him to know the state of his own flocks, but went himself to see them and came in the evening, with his servants *after the herd out of the field*, v. 5. This was an evidence that he was not puffed up with his advancement, as those are most apt to be that are raised from a mean estate. Providence had not yet found him business as a king; he left all to Samuel; and therefore, rather than be idle, he would, for the present, apply himself to his country business again. Though the sons of Belial would, perhaps, despise him the more for it, such as were virtuous and wise, and loved business themselves, would think never the worse of him. He had no revenues settled upon him for the support of his dignity, and he was desirous not to be burdensome to the people, for which reason, like Paul, he worked with his hands; for, if he neglect his domestic affairs, how must he maintain himself and his family? Solomon gives it as a reason why men should look well to their herds because *the crown doth not endure to every generation*, Prov. xxvii. 23, 24. Saul's did not; he must therefore provide something surer.

II. His concern for his neighbours. When he perceived them in tears, he asked, "*What ails the people that they weep?*" Let me know, that, if it be a grievance which can be redressed, I may help them, and that, if not, I may weep with them." Good magistrates are in pain if their subjects are in tears.

III. His zeal for the safety and honour of Israel. When he heard of the insolence of the Ammonites, and the distress of a city, a mother in Israel, *the Spirit of God came upon him*, and put great thoughts into his mind, and his anger was kindled greatly, v. 6. He was angry at the insolence of the Ammonites, angry at the mean and sneaking spirit of the men of Jabesh-Gilead, angry that they had not sent him notice sooner of the Ammonites' descent and the extremity they were likely to be reduced to. He was angry to see his neighbours weeping, when it was fitter for them to be preparing for war. It was a brave and generous fire that was now kindled in the breast of Saul, and such as became his high station.

IV. The authority and power he exerted

upon this important occasion. He soon let Israel know that, though he had retired to his privacy, he had a care for the public, and knew how to command men into the field, as well as how to drive cattle out of the field, v. 5, 7. He sent a summons to all the coasts of Israel, to show the extent of his power beyond his own tribe, even to all the tribes, and ordered all the military men forthwith to appear in arms at a general rendezvous in Bezek. Observe, 1. His modesty, in joining Samuel in commission with himself. He would not execute the office of a king without a due regard to that of a prophet. 2. His mildness in the penalty threatened against those that should disobey his orders. He hews a yoke of oxen in pieces, and sends the pieces to the several cities of Israel, threatening, with respect to him who should decline the public service, not, "Thus shall it be done to *him*," but, "Thus shall it be done to his *oxen*." God had threatened it as a great judgment (Deut. xxviii. 31), *Thy ox shall be slain before thy eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof*. It was necessary that the command should be enforced with some penalty, but this was not nearly so severe as that which was affixed to a similar order by the whole congregation, Judg. xxi. 5. Saul wished to show that his government was more gentle than that which they had been under. The effect of this summons was that the militia, or trained bands, of the nation, *came out as one man*, and the reason given is, *because the fear of the Lord fell upon them*. Saul did not affect to make them fear him, but they were influenced to observe his orders by the fear of God and a regard to him who had made Saul their king and them members one of another. Note, Religion and the fear of God will make men good subjects, good soldiers, and good friends to the public interests of their country. Those that fear God will make conscience of their duty to all men, particularly to their rulers.

V. His prudent proceedings in this great affair, v. 8. He numbered those that came in to him, that he might know his own strength, and how to distribute his forces in the best manner their numbers would allow. It is the honour of princes to know the number of their men, but it is the honour of the King of kings that *there is not any number of his armies*, Job xxv. 3. In this muster, it seems, Judah, though numbered by itself, made no great figure; for, as it was one tribe of twelve, so it was but an eleventh part of the whole number, 30,330, though the rendezvous was at Bezek, in that tribe. They wanted the numbers, or the courage, or the zeal for which that tribe used to be famous; so low was it, just before the sceptre was brought into it in David.

VI. His faith and confidence, and (grounded thereon) his courage and resolution, in this enterprise. It should seem that those very

messengers who brought the tidings from Jabesh-Gilead Saul sent into the country to raise the militia, who would be sure to be faithful and careful in their own business, and then he now sends back to their distressed countrymen, with this assurance (in which, it is probable, Samuel encouraged him): "*To-morrow*, by such an hour, before the enemy can pretend that the seven days have expired, *you shall have deliverance*, v. 9. Be you ready to do your part, and we will not fail to do ours. Do you sally out upon the besiegers, while we surround them." Saul knew he had a just cause, a clear call, and God on his side, and therefore doubted not of success. This was good news to the besieged Gileadites, whose right eyes had wept themselves dry for their calamities, and now began to fail with looking for relief and to ache in expectation of the doom of the ensuing day, when they must look their last; the greater the exigence the more welcome the deliverance. When they heard it they were glad, relying on the assurances that were sent to them. And they sent into the enemies' camp (v. 10) to tell them that next day they would be ready to meet them, which the enemies understood as an intimation that they despaired of relief, and so were made the more secure by it. If they took not care, by sending out scouts, to rectify their own mistake, they must thank themselves if they were surprised: the besieged were under no obligation to give them notice of the help they were assured of.

VII. His industry and close application to this business. If he had been bred up to war from his youth, and had led regiments as often as he had followed droves, he could not have gone about an affair of this nature more dexterously nor more diligently. When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon men it will make them expert even without experience. A vast army (especially in comparison with the present usage) Saul had now at his foot, and a long march before him, nearly sixty miles, and over Jordan too. No cavalry in his army, but all infantry, which he divides into three battalions, v. 11. And observe, 1. With what incredible swiftness he flew to the enemy. In a day and a night he came to the place of action, where his own fate, and that of Israel, must be determined. He had passed his word, and would not break it; nay, he was better than his word, for he promised help next day, *by that time the sun was hot* (v. 9), but brought it before day, *in the morning-watch*, v. 11. Whom God helps he *helps right early*, Ps. xlv. 5. 2. With what incredible bravery he flew upon the enemy. Betimes in the morning, when they lay dreaming of the triumphs they expected that day over the miserable inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead, before they were aware he was in the midst of their host; and his men being marched against them in three columns, surrounded them on

every side, so that they could have neither heart nor time to make head against them.

*Lastly,* To complete his honour, God crowned all these virtues with success. Jabesh-Gilead was rescued, and the Ammonites were totally routed; he had now the day before him to complete his victory in, and so complete a victory it was that those who remained, after a great slaughter, were scattered so that *two of them were not left together* to encourage or help one another, *v. 11.* We may suppose that Saul was the more vigorous in this matter, 1. Because there was some alliance between the tribe of Benjamin and the city of Jabesh-Gilead. That city had declined joining with the rest of the Israelites to destroy Gibeah, which was then punished as their crime, but perhaps was now remembered as their kindness, when Saul of Gibeah came with so much readiness and resolution to relieve Jabesh-Gilead. Yet that was not all; two-thirds of the Benjamites that then remained were provided with wives from that city (*Judg. xxi. 14.*), so that most of the mothers of Benjamin were daughters of Jabesh-Gilead, for which city Saul, being a Benjamite, had therefore a particular kindness; and we find they returned his kindness, *ch. xxxi. 11, 12.* 2. Because it was the Ammonites' invasion that induced the people to desire a king (so Samuel says, *ch. xii. 12.*), so that if he had not done his part, in this expedition, he would have disappointed their expectations, and for ever forfeited their respect.

12 And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death. 13 And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel. 14 Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. 15 And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

We have here the improvement of the glorious victory which Saul had obtained, not the improvement of it abroad, though we take it for granted that the men of Jabesh-Gilead, having so narrowly saved their right eyes, would with them now discern the opportunity they had of avenging themselves upon these cruel enemies and disabling them from ever straitening them in like manner again; now shall they be avenged on the Ammonites for their right

eyes condemned, as Samson on the Philistines for his two eyes put out, *Judg. xvi. 28.* But the account here given is of the improvement of this victory at home.

I. The people took this occasion to show their jealousy for the honour of Saul, and their resentment of the indignities done him. Samuel, it seems, was present, if not in the action (it was too far for him to march) yet to meet them when they returned victorious; and to him, as judge, the motion was made (for they knew Saul would not be judge in his own cause) that the sons of Belial that would not have him to reign over them should be brought forth and slain, *v. 12.* Saul's good fortune (as foolish men commonly call it) went further with them to confirm his title than either his choice by lot or Samuel's anointing him. They had not courage thus to move for the prosecution of those that opposed him when he himself looked mean, but, now that his victory made him look great, nothing would serve but they must be put to death.

II. Saul took this occasion to give further proofs of his clemency, for, without waiting for Samuel's answer, he himself quashed the motion (*v. 13*): *There shall not a man be put to death this day.* no, not those men, those bad men, that had abused him, and therein reflected on God himself, 1. Because it was a day of joy and triumph: "*To day the Lord has wrought salvation in Israel;* and, since God has been so good to us all, let us not be harsh one to another. Now that God has made the heart of Israel in general so glad, let not us make sad the hearts of any particular Israelites." 2. Because he hoped they were by this day's work brought to a better temper, were now convinced that this man, under God, could save them, now honoured him whom before they had despised; and, if they are but reclaimed, he is secured from receiving any disturbance by them, and therefore his point is gained. If an enemy be made a friend, that will be more to our advantage than to have him slain. And all good princes consider that their power is for edification, not for destruction.

III. Samuel took this occasion to call the people together *before the Lord in Gilgal, v. 14, 15.* 1. That they might publicly give God thanks for their late victory. There they rejoiced greatly, and, that God might have the praise of that which they had the comfort of, they sacrificed to him, as the giver of all their successes, *sacrifices of peace-offerings.* 2. That they might confirm Saul in the government, more solemnly than had been yet done, that he might not retire again to his obscurity. Samuel would have the kingdom renewed; he would renew his resignation, and the people should renew their approbation, and so in concurrence with, or rather in attendance upon, the divine nomination, they made Saul king, making it their own act and deed to submit to him.

## CHAP. XII.

We left the general assembly of the states together, in the close of the foregoing chapter; in this chapter we have Samuel's speech to them, when he resigned the government into the hands of Saul, in which, I. He clears himself from all suspicion or imputation of mismanagement, while the administration was in his hands, ver. 1-5. II. He reminds them of the great things God had done for them and for their fathers, ver. 6-13. III. He sets before them good and evil, the blessing and the curse, ver. 14, 15. IV. He awakens them to regard what he said to them, by calling to God for thunder, ver. 16-19. V. He encourages them with hopes that all should be well, ver. 20-25. This is his farewell sermon to that august assembly and Saul's coronation sermon.

**A**ND Samuel said unto Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. 2 And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. 3 Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4 And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 5 And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.

Here, I. Samuel gives them a short account of the late revolution, and of the present posture of their government, by way of preface to what he had further to say to them, v. 1, 2. 1. For his own part, he had spent his days in their service; he began betimes to be useful among them, and had continued long so: "I have walked before you, as a guide to direct you, as a shepherd that leads his flock (Ps. lxxx. 1), from my childhood unto this day." As soon as he was illuminated with the light of prophecy, in his early days, he began to be a burning and shining light to Israel; "and now my best days are done: I am old and gray-headed;" therefore they were the more unkind to cast him off, yet therefore he was the more willing to resign, finding the weight of government heavy upon his stooping shoulders. He was old, and therefore the more able to advise them, and the more observant they should have been of what he said, for days shall speak and the multitude of years shall teach wisdom; and there is a particular reverence due to the aged, especially aged magistrates and aged ministers. "I am old,

and therefore not likely to live long, perhaps may never have an opportunity of speaking to you again, and therefore take notice of what I say." 2. As for his sons, "Behold" (says he), "they are with you, you may, if you please, call them to an account for any thing they have done amiss. They are present with you, and have not, upon this revolution, fled from their country. They are upon the level with you, subjects to the new king as well as you: if you can prove them guilty of any wrong, you may prosecute them now by a due course of law, punish them, and oblige them to make restitution." 3. As for their new king, Samuel had gratified them in setting him over them (v. 1): "I have hearkened to your voice in all that you said to me, being desirous to please you, if possible, and make you easy, though to the discarding of myself and family; and now will you hearken to me, and take my advice?" The change was now perfected. "Behold, the king walketh before you" (v. 2); he appears in public, ready to serve you in public business. Now that you have made yourselves like the nations in your civil government, and have cast off the divine administration in that, take heed lest you make yourselves like the nations in religion and cast off the worship of God.

II. He solemnly appeals to them concerning his own integrity in the administration of the government (v. 3): *Witness against me, whose ox have I taken?* Observe,

1. His design in this appeal. By this he intended, (1.) To convince them of the injury they had done him in setting him aside, when they had nothing amiss to charge him with (his government had no fault but that it was too cheap, too easy, too gentle), and also of the injury they had done themselves in turning off one that did not so much as take an ox or an ass from them, to put themselves under the power of one that would take from them their fields and vineyards, nay, and their very sons and daughters (ch. viii. 11), so unlike would the manner of the king be from Samuel's manner. (2.) To preserve his own reputation. Those that heard of Samuel's being rejected as he was would be ready to suspect that certainly he had done some evil thing, or he would never have been so ill treated; so that it was necessary for him to make this challenge, that it might appear upon record that it was not for any iniquity in his hands that he was laid aside, but to gratify the humour of a giddy people, who owned they could not have a better man to rule them, only they desired a bigger man. There is a just debt which every man owes to his own good name, especially men in public stations, which is to guard it against unjust aspersions and suspicions, that we may finish our course with honour as well as joy. (3.) As he designed hereby to leave a good name behind him, so he designed to leave his suc-

cessor a good example before him; let him write after his copy, and he will write fair. (4.) He designed, in the close of his discourse, to reprove the people, and therefore he begins with a vindication of himself; for he that will, with confidence, tell another of his sin, must see to it that he himself be clear.

2. In the appeal itself observe,

(1.) What it is that Samuel here acquits himself from. [1.] He had never, under any pretence whatsoever, taken that which was not his own, ox or ass, had never distrained their cattle for tribute, fines, or forfeitures, nor used their service without paying for it. [2.] He had never defrauded those with whom he dealt, nor oppressed those that were under his power. [3.] He had never taken bribes to pervert justice, nor was ever biassed by favour or affection to give judgment in a cause against his conscience.

(2.) How he calls upon those that had slighted him to bear witness concerning his conduct: "*Here I am; witness against me.* If you have any thing to lay to my charge, do it *before the Lord and the king*, the proper judges." He puts honour upon Saul, by owning himself accountable to him if guilty of any wrong.

III. Upon this appeal he is honourably acquitted. He did not expect that they would do him honour at parting, though he well deserved it, and therefore mentioned not any of the good services he had done them, for which they ought to have applauded him, and returned him the thanks of the house; all he desired was that they should do him justice, and that they did (v. 4), readily owning, 1. That he had not made his government oppressive to them, nor used his power to their wrong. 2. That he had not made it expensive to them: *Neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand* for the support of thy dignity. Like Nehemiah, he did not require the bread of the governor (Neh. v. 18), had not only been righteous, but generous, had coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, Acts xx. 33.

IV. This honourable testimony borne to Samuel's integrity is left upon record to his honour (v. 5): "*The Lord is witness*, who searcheth the heart, *and his anointed is witness*, who trieth overt acts;" and the people agree to it: "*He is witness.*" Note, The testimony of our neighbours, and especially the testimony of our own consciences for us, that we have in our places lived honestly, will be our comfort under the slights and contempts that are put upon us. Demetrius is a happy man, that has a *good report of all men and of the truth itself*, 3 John 12.

6 And Samuel said unto the people, *It is the LORD* that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7 Now therefore stand still, that I

may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8 When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. 9 And when they forgot the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10 And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. 11 And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12 And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God *was* your king. 13 Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, *and* whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you. 14 If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: 15 But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as *it was* against your fathers.

Samuel, having sufficiently secured his own reputation, instead of upbraiding the people upon it with their unkindness to him, sets himself to instruct them, and keep them in the way of their duty, and then the change of the government would be the less damage to them.

I. He reminds them of the great goodness of God to them and to their fathers, gives them an abstract of the history of their nation, that, by the consideration of the great

things God had done for them, they might be for ever engaged to love him and serve him. "Come," says he (v. 7), "stand still, stand in token of reverence when God is speaking to you, stand still in token of attention and composedness of mind, and give me leave to reason with you." Religion has reason on its side, Isa. i. 18. The work of ministers is to reason with people, not only to exhort and direct, but to persuade, to convince men's judgments, and so to gain their wills and affections. Let reason rule men, and they will be good. He reasons of the righteous acts of the Lord, that is, "both the benefits he hath bestowed upon you, in performance of his promises, and the punishments he has inflicted on you for your sins." His favours are called *his righteous acts* (Judg. v. 11), because in them he is just to his own honour. He not only puts them in mind of what God had done for them in their days, but of what he had done of old, in the days of their fathers, because the present age had the benefit of God's former favours. We may suppose that his discourse was much larger than as here related.

1. He reminds them of their deliverance out of Egypt. Into that house of bondage Jacob and his family came down poor and little; when they were oppressed they cried unto God, who advanced Moses and Aaron, from mean beginnings, to be their deliverers, and the founders of their state and settlement in Canaan, v. 6, 8. 2. He reminds them of the miseries and calamities which their fathers brought themselves into by forgetting God and serving other gods, v. 9. They enslaved themselves, for they were sold as criminals and captives into the hand of oppressors. They exposed themselves to the desolation of war, and their neighbours fought against them. 3. He reminds them of their fathers' repentance and humiliation before God for their idolatries: *They said, We have sinned, v. 10.* Let not them imitate the sins of their fathers, for what they had done amiss they had many a time wished undone again. In the day of their distress they had sought unto God, and had promised to serve him; let their children then reckon that good at all times which they found good in bad times. 4. He reminds them of the glorious deliverances God had wrought for them, the victories he had blessed them with, and their happy settlements, many a time, after days of trouble and distress, v. 11. He specifies some of their judges, Gideon and Jephthah, great conquerors in their time; among the rest he mentions Bedan, whom we read not of any where else: he might be some eminent person, that was instrumental of salvation to them, though not recorded in the book of Judges, such a one as Shamgar, of whom it is said that he *delivered* Israel, but not that he *judged* them, Judg. iii. 31. Perhaps this Bedan guarded and delivered them on one side, at the same

time when some other of the judges appeared and acted for them on another side. Some think it was the same with Jair (so the learned Mr. Poole), others the same with Samson, who was Ben Dan, a son of Dan, of that tribe, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him Be-Dan, in Dan, in the camp of Dan. Samuel mentions himself, not to his own praise, but to the honour of God, who had made him an instrument of subduing the Philistines. 5. At last he puts them in mind of God's late favour to the present generation, in gratifying them with a king, when they would prescribe to God by such a one to save them out of the hand of Nahash king of Ammon, v. 12, 13. Now it appears that this was the immediate occasion of their desiring a king: Nahash threatened them; they desired Samuel to nominate a general; he told them that God was commander-in-chief in all their wars and they needed no other, that what was wanting in them should be made up by his power: *The Lord is your king.* But they insisted on it, *Nay, but a king shall reign over us.* "And now," said he, "you have a king, a king of your own asking—let that be spoken to your shame; but a king of God's making—let that be spoken to his honour and the glory of his grace." God did not cast them off, even when they in effect cast him off.

II. He shows them that they are now upon their good behaviour, they and their king. Let them not think that they had now cut themselves off from all dependence upon God, and that now, having a king of their own, the making of their own fortunes (as men foolishly call it) was in their own hands; no, still their judgment must proceed from the Lord. He tells them plainly,

1. That their obedience to God would certainly be their happiness, v. 14. If they would not revolt from God to idols, nor rebel against him by breaking his commandments, but would persevere in their allegiance to him, would fear his wrath, serve his interests, and obey his will, then they and their king should certainly be happy; but observe how the promise is expressed: *Then you shall continue following the Lord your God;* that is, (1.) "You shall continue in the way of your duty to God, which will be your honour and comfort." Note, To those that are sincere in their religion God will give grace to persevere in it: those that follow God faithfully will be divinely strengthened to continue following him. And observe, Following God is a work that is its own wages. It is the matter of a promise as well as of a precept. (2.) "You shall continue under the divine guidance and protection:" *You shall be after the Lord,* so it is in the original, that is, "he will go before you to lead and prosper you, and make your way plain. *The Lord is with you while you are with him.*"

2. That their disobedience would as cer-



tainly be their ruin (v. 15): "If you rebel, think not that your having a king will secure you against God's judgments, and that having in this instance made yourselves like the nations you may sin at as cheap a rate as they can. No, the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers when they offended him, in the days of the judges." We mistake if we think that we can evade God's justice by shaking off his dominion. If God shall not rule us, yet he will judge us.

16 Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. 17 Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. 18 So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. 19 And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins *this* evil, to ask us a king. 20 And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; 21 And turn ye not aside; for *then should ye go* after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they *are* vain. 22 For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. 23 Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: 24 Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. 25 But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.

Two things Samuel here aims at:—

I. To convince the people of their sin in desiring a king. They were now rejoicing before God in and with their king (*ch. xi. 15*), and offering to God the sacrifices of praise, which they hoped God would accept; and this perhaps made them think that there was no

harm in their asking a king, but really they had done well in it. Therefore Samuel here charges it upon them as their sin, as wickedness, *great wickedness in the sight of the Lord*. Note, Though we meet with prosperity and success in a way of sin, yet we must not therefore think the more favourably of it. They have a king, and if they conduct themselves well their king may be a very great blessing to them, and yet Samuel will have them perceive and see that their *wickedness was great in asking a king*. We must never think well of that which God in his law frowns upon, though in his providence he may seem to smile upon it. Observe,

1. The expressions of God's displeasure against them for asking a king. At Samuel's word, God sent prodigious thunder and rain upon them, at a season of the year when, in that country, the like was never seen or known before, v. 16—18. Thunder and rain have natural causes and sometimes terrible effects. But Samuel made it to appear that this was designed by the almighty power of God on purpose to convince them that they had done very *wickedly in asking a king*; not only by its coming in an unusual time, in wheat-harvest, and this on a fair clear day, when there appeared not to the eye any signs of a storm, but by his giving notice of it before. Had there happened to be thunder and rain at the time when he was speaking to them, he might have improved it for their awakening and conviction, as we may in a like case; but, to make it no less than a miracle, before it came, (1.) He spoke to them of it (v. 16, 17): *Stand and see this great thing*. He had before told them to *stand and hear* (v. 7); but, because he did not see that his reasoning with them affected them (so stupid were they and unthinking), now he bids them *stand and see*. If what he said in a *still small voice* did not reach their hearts, nor his doctrine which dropped as the dew, they shall hear God speaking to them in dreadful claps of thunder and the great rain of his strength. He appealed to this as a sign: "I will call upon the Lord, and he will send thunder, will send it just now, to confirm the word of his servant, and to make you see that I spoke truly when I told you that God was angry with you for asking a king." And the event proved him a true prophet the sign and wonder came to pass. (2.) He spoke to God for it. Samuel called unto the Lord, and, in answer to his prayer, even while he was yet speaking, *the Lord sent thunder and rain*. By this Samuel made it to appear, not only what a powerful influence God has upon this earth, that he could, of a sudden, when natural causes did not work towards it, produce this dreadful rain and thunder, and bring them out of his treasures (Ps. cxxxv. 7), but also what a powerful interest he had in heaven, that God would thus *hearken to the voice of a man* (Josh. x. 14) and answer him *in the secret place of thunder*,

Ps. lxxxi. 7. Samuel, that son of prayer, was still famous for success in prayer. Now by this extraordinary thunder and rain sent on this occasion, [1.] God testified his displeasure against them in the same way in which he had formerly testified it, and at the prayer of Samuel too, against the Philistines. *The Lord discomfited them with a great thunder, ch. vii. 10.* Now that Israel rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit, he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them with the same weapons which, not long before, had been employed against their adversaries, Isa. lxiii. 10. [2.] He showed them their folly in desiring a king to save them, rather than God or Samuel, promising themselves more from an arm of flesh than from the arm of God or from the power of prayer. Could their king *thunder with a voice like God?* Job. xl. 9. Could their prince command such forces as the prophet could by his prayers? [3.] He intimated to them that how serene and prosperous soever their condition seemed to be now that they had a king, like the weather in wheat-harvest, yet, if God pleased, he could soon change the face of their heavens, and persecute them with his tempest, as the Psalmist speaks.

2. The impressions which this made upon the people. It startled them very much, as well it might. (1.) *They greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.* Though when they had a king they were ready to think they must fear him only, God made them know that *he is greatly to be feared* and his prophets for his sake. Now they were rejoicing in their king, God taught them to rejoice with trembling. (2.) They owned their sin and folly in desiring a king: *We have added to all our sins this evil, v. 19.* Some people will not be brought to a sight of their sins by any gentler methods than storms and thunders. Samuel did not extort this confession from them till the matter was settled and the king confirmed, lest it should look as if he designed by it rather to establish himself in the government than to bring them to repentance. Now that they were *flattering themselves in their own eyes, their iniquity was found to be hateful, Ps. xxxvi. 2.* (3.) They earnestly begged Samuel's prayers (v. 19) *Pray for thy servants, that we die not.* They were apprehensive of their danger from the wrath of God, and could not expect that he should hear their prayers for themselves, and therefore they entreat Samuel to pray for them. Now they see their need of him whom awhile ago they slighted. Thus many that will not have *Christ to reign over them* would yet be glad to have him intercede for them, to turn away the wrath of God. And the time may come when those that have despised and ridiculed praying people will value their prayers, and desire a share in them. "Pray" (say they) "to the Lord thy God; we know not how to call him ours, but, if thou hast any interest in him, improve it for us."

II. He aims to confirm the people in their religion, and engage them for ever to cleave unto the Lord. The design of his discourse is much the same with Joshua's, *ch. xxiii. and xxiv.*

1. He would not that the terrors of the Lord should frighten them from him, for they were intended to frighten them to him (v. 20): "*Fear not; though you have done all this wickedness, and though God is angry with you for it, yet do not therefore abandon his service, nor turn from following him.*" *Fear not*, that is, "despair not, fear not with amazement, the weather will clear up after the storm. Fear not; for, though God will frown upon his people, yet he will not forsake them (v. 22) *for his great name's sake; do not you forsake him then.*" Every transgression in the covenant, though it displease the Lord, yet does not throw us out of covenant, and therefore God's just rebukes must not drive us from our hope in his mercy. The fixedness of God's choice is owing to the freeness of it; we may therefore hope he will not forsake his people, because it has *pleased him to make them his people.* Had he chosen them for their good merits, we might fear he would cast them off for their bad merits; but, choosing them *for his name's sake, for his name's sake* he will not leave them.

2. He cautions them against idolatry: "*Turn not aside from God and the worship of him*" (v. 20, and again v. 21); "*for if you turn aside from God, whatever you turn aside to, you will find it is a vain thing, that can never answer your expectations, but will certainly deceive you if you trust to it; it is a broken reed, a broken cistern.*" Idols are so; they are vanity and a lie: whatever we make a god of, we shall find it so. Creatures in their own place are good things, but when put in God's place they are vain things. Idols could not profit those that sought to them in their wants, nor deliver those that sought to them in their straits, for they were vain, and not what they pretended to be. *An idol is nothing in the world, 1 Cor. viii. 4.*

3. He comforts them with an assurance that he would continue his care and concern for them, v. 23. They desired him to pray for them, v. 19. He might have said, "Go to Saul, the king that you have put in my room," and get him to pray for you; but so far is he from upbraiding them with their disrespect to him that he promised them much more than they asked. (1.) They asked it of him as a favour; he promised it as a duty, and startles at the thought of neglecting it. *Pray for you!* says he, *God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in not doing it.* Note, It is a sin against God not to pray for the Israel of God, especially for those of them that are under our charge: and good men are afraid of the guilt of omissions. (2.) They asked him to pray for them at this time, and upon this occasion, but he promised to continue his prayers for them and not to cease as

long as he lived. Our rule is to *pray without ceasing*; we sin if we restrain prayer in general, and in particular if we cease praying for the church. (3.) They asked him only to pray for them, but he promised to do more for them, not only to pray for them, but to teach them; though they were not willing to be under his government as a judge, he would not therefore deny them his instructions as a prophet. And they might be sure he would teach them no other than the *good and the right way*: and the right way is certainly the good way: the way of duty is the way of pleasure and profit.

4. He concludes with an earnest exhortation to practical religion and serious godliness, *v. 24, 25*. The great duty here pressed upon us is to *fear the Lord*. He had said (*v. 20*), "*Fear not with a slavish fear,*" but here, "*Fear the Lord, with a filial fear.*" As the fruit and evidence of this, serve him in the duties of religious worship and of a godly conversation, in truth and sincerity, and not in show and profession only, with your heart, and *with all your heart*, not dissembling, not dividing. And two things he urges by way of motive:—(1.) That they were bound in gratitude to serve God, considering *what great things he had done for them*, to engage them for ever to his service. (2.) That they were bound in interest to serve him, considering what great things he would do against them if they should still do wickedly: "*You shall be destroyed by the judgments of God, both you and your king whom you are so proud of and expect so much from, and who will be a blessing to you if you keep in with God.*" Thus, as a faithful watchman, he gave them warning, and so delivered his own soul.

## CHAP. XIII.

Those that desired a king like all the nations fancied that, when they had one, they should look very great and considerable; but in this chapter we find it proved much otherwise. While Samuel was joined in communion with Saul things went well, *ch. xi. 7*. But, now that Saul began to reign alone, all went to decay, and Samuel's words began to be fulfilled: "You shall be consumed, both you and your king?" for never was the state of Israel further gone in a consumption than in this chapter. 1. Saul appears here a very silly prince. 1. Infatuated in his counsels, *ver. 1—3*. 2. Invaded by his neighbours, *ver. 4, 5*. 3. Deserted by his soldiers, *ver. 6, 7*. 4. Disordered in his own spirit, and sacrificing in confusion, *ver. 8—10*. 5. Chidden by Samuel, *ver. 11—12*. 6. Rejected of God from being king, *ver. 14*. 7. The people appear here a very miserable people. 1. Oisheartened and dispersed, *ver. 5, 7*. 2. Diminished, *ver. 15, 16*. 3. Plundered, *ver. 17, 18*. 4. Disarmed, *ver. 19—22*. Thus they got by casting off God's government, and making themselves like the nations, all their glory departed from them.

SAUL reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, 2 Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; *whereof* two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Beth-el, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent. 3 And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of

it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. 4 And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal. 5 And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. 7 And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling

We are not told wherein it was that the people of Israel offended God, so as to forfeit his presence and turn his hand against them, as Samuel had threatened (*ch. xii. 15*); but doubtless they left God, else he would not have left them, as here it appears he did for,

1. Saul was very weak and impolitic, and did not order his affairs with discretion. *Saul was the son of one year* (so the first words are in the original), a phrase which we make to signify the date of his reign, but ordinarily it signifies the date of one's birth, and therefore some understand it figuratively—he was as innocent and good as a child of a year old; so the Chaldee paraphrase: he was *without fault, like the son of a year*. But, if we admit a figurative sense, it may as well intimate that he was ignorant and imprudent, and as unfit for business as a child of a year old: and the subsequent particulars make this more accordant with his character than the former. But we take it rather, as our own translation has it, *Saul reigned one year*, and nothing happened that was considerable, it was a year of no action; but in his second year he did as follows:—

1. He chose a band of 3000 men, of whom he himself commanded 2000, and his son Jonathan 1000, *v. 2*. The rest of the people he dismissed to their tents. If he intended these only for the guard of his person and his honorary attendants, it was impolitic to have so many, if for a standing army, in apprehension of danger from the Philistines, it was no less impolitic to have so few; and

perhaps the confidence he put in this select number, and his disbanding the rest of that brave army with which he had lately beaten the Ammonites (*ch. xi. 8—11*), was looked upon as an affront to the kingdom, excited general disgust, and was the reason he had so few at his call when he had occasion for them. The prince that relies on a particular party weakens his own interest in the whole community. 2. He ordered his son Jonathan to surprise and destroy the garrison of the Philistines that lay near him in Geba, *v. 3*. I wish there were no ground for supposing that this was a violation or infraction of some articles with the Philistines, and that it was done treacherously and perfidiously. The reason why I suspect it is because it is said that, for doing it, *Israel was had in abomination*, or, as the word is, *did stink with the Philistines* (*v. 4*), as men void of common honesty and whose word could not be relied on. If it was so, we will lay the blame, not on Jonathan who did it, but on Saul, his prince and father, who ordered him to do it, and perhaps kept him in ignorance of the truth of the matter. Nothing makes the name of Israel odious to those that are without so much as the fraud and dishonesty of those that are called by that worthy name. If professors of religion cheat and overreach, break their word and betray their trust, religion suffers by it, and is *had in abomination with the Philistines*. Whom may one trust if not an Israelite, one that, it is expected, should be *without guile*? 3. When he had thus exasperated the Philistines, then he began to raise forces, which, if he had acted wisely, he would have done before. When the Philistines had a vast army ready to pour in upon him, to avenge the wrong he had done them, then was he *blowing the trumpet through the land*, among a careless, if not a disaffected people, saying, *Let the Hebrews hear* (*v. 3*), and so as many as thought fit came to Saul to Gilgal, *v. 4*. But now the generality, we may suppose, drew back (either in dislike of Saul's politics or in dread of the Philistines' power), who, if he had summoned them sooner, would have been as ready at his beck as they were when he marched against the Ammonites. We often find that after-wit would have done much better before and have prevented much inconvenience.

11. Never did the Philistines appear in such a formidable body as they did now, upon this provocation which Saul gave them. We may suppose they had great assistance from their allies, for (*v. 5*), besides 6000 horse, which in those times, when horses were not so much used in war as they are now, was a great body, they had an incredible number of chariots, 30,000 in all: most of them, we may suppose, were carriages for the bag and baggage of so vast an army, not chariots of war. But their foot was *innumerable as the sand of the sea-shore*, so jea-

lous were they for the honour of their nation and so much enraged at the baseness of the Israelites in destroying their garrison. If Saul had asked counsel of God before he had given the Philistines this provocation, he and his people might the better have borne this threatening trouble which they had now brought on themselves by their own folly.

III. Never were the people of Israel so faint-hearted, so sneaking, so very cowardly, as they were now. Some considerable numbers, it may be, came to Saul to Gilgal; but, hearing of the Philistines' numbers and preparations, their spirits sunk within them, some think because they did not find Samuel there with Saul. Those that, awhile ago, were weary of him, and wished for a king, now had small joy of their king unless they could see him under Samuel's direction. Sooner or later, men will be made to see that God and his prophets are their best friends. Now that they saw the Philistines making war upon them, and Samuel not coming in to help them, they knew not what to do; *men's hearts failed them for fear*. And, 1. Some absconded. Rather than run upon death among the Philistines, they buried themselves alive in caves and thickets, *v. 6*. See what work sin makes; it exposes men to perils, and then robs them of their courage and dispirits them. A single person, by faith, can say, *I will not be afraid of 10,000* (*Ps. iii. 6*); but here thousands of degenerate Israelites tremble at the approach of a great crowd of Philistines. Guilt makes men cowards. 2. Others fled (*v. 7*): They *went over Jordan to the land of Gilead*, as far as they could from the danger, and to a place where they had lately been victorious over the Ammonites. Where they had triumphed they hoped to be sheltered. 3. Those that staid with Saul *followed him trembling*, expecting no other than to be cut off; and having their hands and hearts very much weakened by the desertion of so many of their troops. And perhaps Saul himself, though he had so much honour as to stand his ground, yet had no courage to spare wherewith to inspire his trembling soldiers.

8 And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel *had appointed*: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. 9 And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. 10 And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. 11 And Samuel said, What

hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* thou camest not within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; 12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. 13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. 14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

Here is, I. Saul's offence in offering sacrifice before Samuel came. Samuel, when he anointed him, had ordered him to tarry for him seven days in Gilgal, promising that, at the end of those days, he would be sure to come to him, and both offer sacrifices for him and direct him what he should do. This we had *ch. x. 8.* Perhaps that order, though inserted there, was given him afterwards, or was given him as a general rule to be observed in every public congress at Gilgal, or, as is most probable, though not mentioned again, was lately repeated with reference to this particular occasion; for it is plain that Saul himself understood it as obliging him from God now to stay till Samuel came, else he would not have made so many excuses as he did for not staying, *v. 11.* This order Saul broke. He staid till the seventh day, yet had not patience to wait till the end of the seventh day. Perhaps he began to reproach Samuel as false to his word, careless of his country, and disrespectful of his prince, and thought it more fit that Samuel should wait for him than he for Samuel. However, 1. He presumed to offer sacrifice without Samuel, and nothing appears to the contrary but that he did it himself, though he was neither priest nor prophet, as if, because he was a king, he might do any thing, a piece of presumption which king Uzziah paid dearly for, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, &c. 2. He determined to engage the Philistines without Samuel's directions, though he had promised to *show him what he should do.* So self-sufficient Saul was that he thought it not worth while to stay for a

prophet of the Lord either to pray for him or to advise him. This was Saul's offence, and that which aggravated it was, (1.) That, for aught that appears, he did not send any messenger to Samuel, to know his mind, to represent the case to him, and to receive fresh directions from him, though he had enough about him that were swift enough of foot at this time. (2.) That when Samuel came he rather seemed to boast of what he had done than to repent of it; for he *went forth to salute him*, as his brother-sacrificer, and seemed pleased with the opportunity he had of letting Samuel know that he needed him not, but could do well enough without him. He went out to *bless him*, so the word is, as if he now thought himself a complete priest, empowered to bless as well as sacrifice, whereas he should have gone out to be blessed by him. (3.) That he charged Samuel with breach of promise: *Thou camest not within the days appointed (v. 11)*, and therefore if any thing was amiss Samuel must bear the blame, who was God's minister; whereas he did come according to his word, before the seven days had expired. Thus the *scoffers of the latter days* think the promise of Christ's coming is broken, because he does not come in their time, though it is certain he will come at the set time. (4.) That when he was charged with disobedience he justified himself in what he had done, and gave no sign at all of repentance for it. It is not sinning that ruins men, but sinning and not repenting, falling and not getting up again. See what excuses he made, *v. 11, 12.* He would have this act of disobedience pass, [1.] For an instance of his prudence. The people were most of them scattered from him, and he had no other way than this to keep those with him that remained and to prevent their deserting too. If Samuel neglected the public concerns, he would not. [2.] For an instance of his piety. He would be thought very devout, and in great care not to engage the Philistines till he had by prayer and sacrifice engaged God on his side: "*The Philistines,*" said he, "*will come down upon me, before I have made my supplication to the Lord, and then I am undone.* What! go to war before I have said my prayers! Thus he covered his disobedience to God's command with a pretence of concern for God's favour. Hypocrites lay a great stress upon the external performances of religion, thinking thereby to excuse their neglect of the *weightier matters of the law.* And yet, lastly, He owns it went against his conscience to do it: *I forced myself and offered a burnt-offering*, perhaps boasting that he had broken through his convictions and got the better of them, or at least thinking this extenuated his fault, that he knew he should not have done as he did, but did it with reluctancy. Foolish man! to think that God would be well pleased with sacrifices offered in direct op-

position both to his general and particular command.

II. The sentence passed upon Saul for this offence. Samuel found him standing by his burnt-offering, but, instead of an answer of peace, was sent to him with heavy tidings, and let him know that *the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord*, much more when he brings it, as Saul did, *with a wicked mind*. 1. He shows him the aggravations of his crime, and says to this king, *Thou art wicked*, which it is not for any but a prophet of the Lord to say, Job xxxiv. 18. He charges him with being an enemy to himself and his interest—*Thou hast done foolishly*, and a rebel to God and his government—*“Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, that commandment wherewith he intended to try thy obedience.”* Note, Those that disobey the commandments of God do foolishly for themselves. Sin is folly, and sinners are the greatest fools. 2. He reads his doom (r. 14): *“Thy kingdom shall not continue long to thee or thy family; God has his eye upon another, a man after his own heart, and not like thee, that will have thy own will and way.”* The sentence is in effect the same with *Mene tekel*, only now there seems room left for Saul's repentance, upon which this sentence would have been reversed; but, upon the next act of disobedience, it was made irreversible, ch. xv. 29. And now, better a thousand times he had continued in obscurity tending his asses than to be enthroned and so soon dethroned. But was not this hard, to pass so severe a sentence upon him and his house for a single error, an error that seemed so small, and in excuse for which he had so much to say? No, *The Lord is righteous in all his ways and does no man any wrong, will be justified when he speaks and clear when he judges*. By this, (1.) He shows that there is no sin little, because no little god to sin against; but that every sin is a forfeiture of the heavenly kingdom, for which we stood fair. (2.) He shows that disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, is a great provocation, as in the case of our first parents. (3.) He warns us to *take heed of our spirits*, for that which to men may seem but a small offence, yet to him that knows from what principle and with what disposition of mind it is done, may appear a heinous crime. (4.) God, in rejecting Saul for an error seemingly little, sets off, as by a foil, the lustre of his mercy in forgiving such great sins as those of David, Manasseh, and others. (5.) We are taught hereby how necessary it is that we *wait on our God continually*. Saul lost his kingdom for want of two or three hours' patience.

15 And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the peo-

ple that were present with him, about six hundred men. 16 And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin: but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. 17 And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way that leadeth to Ophrah, unto the land of Shual: 18 And another company turned the way to Beth-horon: and another company turned to the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. 19 Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make *them* swords or spears: 20 But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coultter, and his ax, and his mattock. 21 Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coultters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads. 22 So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found. 23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash.

Here, 1. Samuel departs in displeasure. Saul has set up for himself, and now he is left to himself: *Samuel gat him from Gilgal* (r. 15), and it does not appear that he either prayed with Saul or directed him. Yet in going up to Gibeah of Benjamin, which was Saul's city, he intimated that he had not quite abandoned him, but waited to do him a kindness another time. Or he went to the college of the prophets there, to pray for Saul when he did not think fit to pray with him. 2. Saul goes after him to Gibeah, and there musters his army, and finds his whole number to be but 600 men, r. 15, 16. Thus were they for their sin *diminished and brought low*. 3. The Philistines ravage the country, and put all the adjacent parts under contribution. The body of their army, or standing camp (as it is called in the margin, r. 23), lay in an advantageous pass at Michmash, but thence they sent out three separate parties or detachments that took several ways, to plunder the country, and bring in provisions for the army, r. 17, 18. By these

the land of Israel was both terrified and impoverished, and the Philistines were animated and enriched. This the sin of Israel brought upon them, Isa. xlii. 24. 4. The Israelites that take the field with Saul are unarmed, having only slings and clubs, not a sword or spear among them all, except what Saul and Jonathan themselves have, *v.* 19, 22. See here, (1.) How politic the Philistines were, when they had power in their hands, and did what they pleased in Israel. They put down all the smiths' shops, transplanted the smiths into their own country, and forbade any Israelite, under severe penalties, to exercise the trade or mystery of working in brass or iron, though they had rich mines of both (*Deut.* viii. 9) in such plenty that it was said of Asher, *his shoes shall be iron and brass*, *Deut.* xxxiii. 25. This was subtly done of the Philistines, for hereby they not only prevented the people of Israel from making themselves weapons of war (by which they would be both disused to military exercises and unfurnished when there was occasion), but obliged them to a dependence upon them even for the instruments of husbandry; they must go to them, that is, to some or other of their garrisons, which were dispersed in the country, to have all their iron-work done, and no more might an Israelite do than use a file (*v.* 20, 21), and no doubt the Philistines' smiths brought the Israelites long bills for work done. (2.) How impolitic Saul was, that did not, in the beginning of his reign, set himself to redress this grievance. Samuel's not doing it was very excusable; he fought with other artillery; thunder and lightning, in answer to his prayer, were to him instead of sword and spear; but for Saul, that pretended to be a king like the kings of the nations, to leave his soldiers without swords and spears, and take no care to provide them, especially when he might have done it out of the spoils of the Ammonites whom he conquered in the beginning of his reign, was such a piece of negligence as could by no means be excused. (3.) How slothful and mean-spirited the Israelites were, that suffered the Philistines thus to impose upon them and had no thought nor spirit to help themselves. It was reckoned very bad with them when there was *not a shield or spear found among 40,000 in Israel* (*Judg.* v. 8), and it was no better now, when there was never an Israelite with a sword by his side but the king and his son, never a soldier, never a gentleman; surely they were reduced to this, or began to be so, in Samson's time, for we never find him with sword or spear in his hand. If they had not been dispirited, they could not have been disarmed, but it was sin that made them naked to their shame.

## CHAP. XIV.

We left the host of Israel in a very ill posture, in the close of the foregoing chapter; we saw in them no wisdom, nor strength, nor goodness, to give us ground to expect any other than that they should all be cut off by the army of the Philistines; yet

here we find that infinite power which works without means, and that infinite goodness which gives without merit, glorified in a happy turn to their affairs, that still Samuel's words may be made good: "The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake," *ch.* xii. 22. In this chapter we have, I. The host of the Philistines trampled upon, and triumphed over, by the faith and courage of Jonathan, who unknown to his father (*ver.* 1-5), with his armour-bearer only, made a brave attack upon them, encouraging himself in the Lord his God, *ver.* 4-7. He challenged them (*ver.* 8-12), and, upon their acceptance of the challenge, charged them with such fury, or rather such faith, that he put them to flight, and set them one against another (*ver.* 13-15), which gave opportunity to Saul and his forces, with other Israelites, to follow the blow, and gain a victory, *ver.* 16-23. II. The host of Israel troubled and perplexed by the rashness and folly of Saul, who adjured the people to eat no food till night, which I. Brought Jonathan to a pramure, *ver.* 24-30. 2. Was a temptation to the people, when the time of their fast had expired, to eat with the blood, *ver.* 31-35. Jonathan's error, through ignorance, had like to have been his death, but the people rescued him, *ver.* 36-46. III. In the close we have a general account of Saul's exploits (*ver.* 47, 48) and of his family, *ver.* 49-52.

NOW it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father. 2 And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men; 3 And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, I-chabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone. 4 And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 The forefront of the one was situate northward over against Michmash, and the other southward over against Gibeah. 6 And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few. 7 And his armour-bearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart. 8 Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them. 9 If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up

unto them. 10 But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this *shall be* a sign unto us. 11 And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves. 12 And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel. 13 And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him. 14 And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armourbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half aere of land, *which a yoke of oxen might plough*. 15 And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.

We must here take notice,

I. Of the goodness of God in restraining the Philistines, who had a vast army of valiant men in the field, from falling upon that little handful of timorous trembling people that Saul had with him, whom they would easily have swallowed up at once. It is an invisible power that sets bounds to the malice of the church's enemies, and suffers them not to do that which we should think there is nothing to hinder them from.

II. Of the weakness of Saul, who seems here to have been quite at a loss, and unable to help himself. 1. He pitched his tent under a tree, and had but 600 men with him, v. 2. Where were now the 3000 men he had chosen, and put such a confidence in? *ch. xiii. 2.* Those whom he trusted too much to failed him when he most needed them. He durst not stay in Gibeah, but got into some obscure place, in the uttermost part of the city, under a pomegranate-tree, under *Rimmon* (so the word is), *Ha-Rimmon*, that Rimmon near Gibeah, in the caves of which those 600 Benjamites that escaped hid themselves, *Judg. xx. 47.* Some think that there Saul took shelter, so mean and abject was his spirit, now that he had fallen

under God's displeasure, every hour expecting the Philistines upon him, and thereby the accomplishment of Samuel's threatening, *ch. xiii. 14.* Those can never think themselves safe that see themselves cast out of God's protection. 2. Now he sent for a priest, and the ark, a priest from Shiloh, and the ark from Kirjath-jearim, v. 3, 18. Saul had once offended by offering sacrifice himself, *ch. xiii. 9.* Now he resolves never to fall into that error again, and therefore sends for a priest, and hopes to compromise the matter with God Almighty by a particular reformation, as many do whose hearts are unhumbléd and unchanged. Samuel, the Lord's prophet, had forsaken him, but he thinks he can make up that loss by commanding Ahiah, the Lord's priest, to attend him, and *he* will not make him stay for him nor reprove him, as Samuel had done, but will do just as he bids him, v. 18, 19. Many love to have such ministers as will be what they would have them to be, and prophesy smooth things to them; and their caressing them because they are priests, they hope, will atone for their enmity to those ministers that deal faithfully and plainly with them. He will also have the ark brought, perhaps to upbraid Samuel, who in the days of his government, for aught that appears, had not made any public use of it; or in hopes that this would make up the deficiency of his forces; one would have supposed that they would never bring the ark into the camp again, since, the last time, it not only did not save them, but did itself fall into the Philistines' hands. But it is common for those that have lost the substance of religion to be most fond of the shadows of it, as here is a deserted prince courting a deserted priest.

III. Of the bravery and piety of Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was much fitter than the father to wear the crown. "A sweet imp (says bishop Hall) out of a crab-stock."

1. He resolved to go *incognito*—*unknown to any one*, into the camp of the Philistines; he did not acquaint his father with his design, for he knew he would forbid him; nor the people, for he knew they would all discourage him, and, because he resolved not to heed their objections, he resolved not to hear them, nor ask their advice, v. 1, 3. Nor had he so great an opinion of the priest as to consult him, but, being conscious of a divine impulse putting him upon it, he threw himself into the mouth of danger, in hope of doing service to his country. The way of access to the enemies' camp is described (v. 4, 5) as being peculiarly difficult, and their natural entrenchments impregnable, yet this does not discourage him; the strength and sharpness of the rocks do but harden and whet his resolutions. Great and generous souls are animated by opposition and take a pleasure in breaking through it.

2. He encouraged his armourbearer, a



young man that attended him, to go along with him in this daring enterprise, (v. 6): "Come, and let us put our lives in our hands, and go over to the enemies' garrison, and try what we can do to put them into confusion." See whence he draws his encouragements.

(1.) "They are uncircumcised, and have not the seal of the covenant in their flesh, as we have. Fear not, we shall do well enough with them, for they are not under the protection of God's covenant as we are, cannot call him theirs as we can, by the sign of circumcision." If such as are enemies to us are also strangers to God, we need not fear them. (2.) "God is able to make us two victorious over their unnumbered regiments.

*There is no restraint in the Lord*, no limitation to the holy One of Israel, but it is all one to him to save by many or by few." This is a truth easily granted in general, that it is all alike to Omnipotence what the instruments are by which it works; and yet it is not so easy to apply it to a particular case; when we are but few and feeble then to believe that God can not only save us, but save by us, this is an instance of faith, which, wherever it is, shall obtain a good report. Let this strengthen the weak and encourage the timid: let it be pleaded with God for the enforcing of our petitions and with ourselves for the silencing of our fears: *It is nothing with God to help, whether with many or with those that have no power*, 2 Chron. xiv. 11. (3.) "Who knows but he that can use us for his glory will do it? *It may be the Lord will work for us, work with us, work a sign or miracle for us.*" So the Chaldee. We may encourage ourselves with hope that God will appear for us, though we have not ground on which to build an assurance. An active faith will venture far in God's cause upon an *it may be*. Jonathan's armour-bearer, or esquire, as if he had learned to carry, not his arms only, but his heart, promised to stand by him and to follow him whithersoever he went, v. 7. We have reason to think that Jonathan felt a divine impulse and impression putting him upon this bold adventure, in which he was encouraged by his servant's concurrence, otherwise the danger was so great which he ran upon that he would have tempted God rather than trusted him. And perhaps he had an actual regard to that word of Joshua (Josh. xxiii. 10), *One man of you shall chase a thousand*, borrowed from Moses, Dent. xxxii. 30.

3. How bold soever his resolution was, he resolved to follow Providence in the execution of it, which, he believed, would guide him with its eye (Ps. xxxii. 8), and which therefore he would carefully attend and take hints of direction from. See how he put himself upon Providence, and resolved to be determined by it. "Come" (says he to his confidant), we will discover ourselves to the enemy, as those that are not afraid to look them in the face (v. 8), and then, if they be

so cautious as to bid us stand, we will advance no further, taking it for an intimation of Providence that God would have us act defensively, and we will prepare as well as we can to give them a warm reception (v. 9); but if they be so presumptuous as to challenge us, and the first sentinel we meet with bid us march on, we will push forward, and make as brisk an onset, assuredly gathering thence that it is the will of God we should act offensively, and then not doubting but he will stand by us," v. 10. And upon this issue he puts it, firmly believing, as we all should, (1.) That God has the governing of the hearts and tongues of all men, even of those that know him not, nor have any regard to him, and serves his own purposes by them, though they mean not so, neither do their hearts think so. Jonathan knew God could discover his mind to him if he pleased, and would do it, since he depended upon him, as surely by the mouth of a Philistine as by the mouth of a priest. (2.) That God will, some way or other, direct the steps of those that acknowledge him in all their ways, and seek unto him for direction, with full purpose of heart to follow it. Sometimes we find most comfort in that which is least our own doing, and into which we have been led by the unexpected, but well observed, turns of Providence.

4. Providence gave him the sign he expected, and he answered the signal. He and his armour-bearer did not surprise the Philistines when they were asleep, but discovered themselves to them by day-light, v. 11. The guards of the Philistines, (1.) Disdained them, upbraided them with the cowardice of many of their people, and looked upon them to be of the regiment of sneakers: *Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of their holes*. If some of Christ's soldiers play the coward, others that play the man may perhaps be upbraided with it. (2.) They defied them (v. 12): *Come, and we will show you a thing*, as if they came like children to gaze about them; but meaning, as Goliath (ch. xvii. 44), that they would give them as meat to the fowls of the air. They bantered them, not doubting but to make a prey of them. This greatly emboldened Jonathan. With it he encouraged his servant; he had spoken with uncertainty (v. 6): *It may be the Lord will work for us*; but now he speaks with assurance (v. 12): *The Lord has delivered them*, not into our hands (he sought not his own glory), but into the hand of Israel, for he aimed at nothing but the advantage of the public. His faith being thus strengthened, no difficulty can stand before him; he climbs up the rock upon all four (v. 13), though he has nothing to cover him, nor any but his own servant to second him, nor any human probability of any thing but death before him.

5. The wonderful success of this daring enterprise. The Philistines, instead of falling

upon Jonathan, to slay him, or take him prisoner, fell before him (v. 13) unaccountably, upon the first blow he gave. They fell, that is, (1.) They were many of them slain by him and his armour-bearer, v. 14. Twenty Philistines fell presently. It was not so much the name of Jonathan that made them yield so tamely (though some think that this had become terrible to them, since he smote one of their garrisons, *ch. xiii. 3*), but it was God's right hand and his arm that got him this victory. (2.) The rest were put to flight, and fell foul upon one another (v. 15): *There was trembling in the host*. There was no visible cause for fear; they were so numerous, bold, and advantageously posted; the Israelites had fled before them; not an enemy made head against them, but one gentleman and his man; and yet they shook like an aspen-leaf. The consternation was general: they all trembled; even *the spoilers*, those that had been most bold and forward, shared in the common fright, the joints of their loins were loosed, and their knees smote one against another, and yet none of them could tell why or wherefore. It is called a *trembling of God* (so the original phrase is), signifying not only, as we render it, a very great trembling, which they could not resist nor reason themselves clear of, but that it was supernatural, and came immediately from the hand of God. He that made the heart knows how to make it tremble. To complete the confusion, even the earth quaked, and made them ready to fear that it would sink under them. Those that will not fear the eternal God, he can make afraid of a shadow. See *Prov. xxi. 1*; *Isa. xxxiii. 14*.

16 And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down *one another*. 17 Then said Saul to the people that *were* with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer *were not there*. 18 And Saul said unto Abiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel. 19 And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that *was* in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand. 20 And Saul and all the people that *were* with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against

his fellow, *and there was* a very great discomfiture. 21 Moreover the Hebrews *that were* with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp *from the country* round about, even they also *turned* to be with the Israelites that *were* with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, *when* they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle. 23 So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Beth-aven.

We have here the prosecution and improvement of the wonderful advantages which Jonathan and his armour-bearer gained against the Philistines.

I. The Philistines were, by the power of God, set against one another. They melted away like snow before the sun, and *went on beating down one another* (v. 16), for (v. 20) *every man's sword was against his fellow*. When they fled for fear, instead of turning back upon those that chased them, they reckoned those only their enemies that stood in their way, and treated them accordingly. The Philistines were very secure, because all the swords and spears were in their hands. Israel had none except what Saul and Jonathan had. But now God showed them the folly of that confidence, by making their own swords and spears the instruments of their destruction, and more fatal in their own hands than if they had been in the hands of Israel. See the like done, *Judg. vii. 22*; *2 Chron. xx. 23*.

II. The Israelites were hereby animated against them.

1. Notice was soon taken of it by the watchmen of Saul, those that stood sentinel at Gibeah, v. 16. They were aware that the host of the enemy was in great confusion, and that a great slaughter was made among them, and yet, upon search, they found none of their own forces absent, but only Jonathan and his servant (v. 17), which no doubt greatly animated them, and assured them that it could be no other than the Lord's doing, when there was no more of man's doing than what those two could do against a great host.

2. Saul began to enquire of God, but soon desisted. His spirit had not come down so far as to allow him to consult Samuel, though, it is probable, he was near him; for we read (*ch. xiii. 15*) that he had come to Gibeah of Benjamin; but he called for the ark (v. 18), desiring to know whether it would be safe for him to attack the Philistines, upon the disorder they perceived them to be in. Many will consult God about their safety that would never consult him about

their duty. But, perceiving by his scouts that the noise in the enemy's camp increased, he commanded the priest that officiated to break off abruptly. "Withdraw thy hand" (v. 19), consult no more, wait no longer for an answer. He was very unwise indeed if (as some think) he forbade him to lift up his hands in prayer; for when Joshua was actually engaged with Amalek Moses continued still to lift up his hands. It is rather a prohibition to his enquiring of the Lord, either, (1.) Because now he thought he did not need an answer, the case was plain enough. And yet the more evident it was that God did all the more reason he had to enquire whether he would give him leave to do any thing. Or, (2.) Because now he would not stay for it; he was in such haste to fight a falling enemy that he would not stay to make an end of his devotions, nor hear what answer God would give him. A little thing will divert a vain and carnal mind from religious exercises. He that believeth will not make haste, such haste as this, nor reckon any business so urgent as not to allow time to take God along with him.

3. He, and all the little force he had, made a vigorous attack upon the enemy; and all the people *were cried together* (so the word is, v. 20), for want of the silver trumpets where-with God appointed them to sound an alarm in the day of battle, Num. x. 9. They summoned them together by shouting, and their number was not so great but that they might soon be got together. And now they seem bold and brave when the work is done to their hands. Our Lord Jesus has conquered our spiritual enemies, routed and dispersed them, so that we are cowards indeed if we will not stand to our arms when it is only to pursue the victory and to divide the spoil.

4. Every Hebrew, even those from whom one would least have expected it, now turned his hand against the Philistines. (1.) Those that had deserted and gone over to the enemy, and were among them, now fought against them, v. 21. Some think, they were such as had been taken prisoners by them, and now they were as goads in their sides. It rather seems that they went in to them voluntarily, but, now that they saw them falling, recovered the hearts of Israelites, and did valiantly for their country. (2.) Those that had fled their colours, and hid themselves in the mountains, returned to their posts, and joined in with the pursuers (v. 22), hoping by their great zeal and officiousness, now that the danger was over and the victory sure, to atone for their former cowardice. It was not much to their praise to appear now, but it would have been more their reproach if they had not appeared. Those are remiss and faint-hearted indeed that will not act in the cause of God when they see it victorious, as well as righteous. Thus all hands were at work against the

Philistines, and every Israelite slew as many as he could, without sword or spear; yet it is said (v. 23), it was *the Lord that saved Israel that day*. He did it by them, for without him they could do nothing. *Salvation is of the Lord*.

24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed *be* the man that eateth *any* food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted *any* food. 25 And all *they* of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. 26 And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that *was* in his hand, and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. 28 Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed *be* the man that eateth *any* food this day. And the people were faint. 29 Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? 31 And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Ajalon: and the people were very faint. 32 And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew *them* on the ground: and the people did eat *them* with the blood. 33 Then they told Saul, saying, Behold, the people sin against the LORD, in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day. 34 And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox,

and every man his sheep, and slay *them* here, and eat; and sin not against the LORD in eating with the blood. And all the people brought every man his ox with him that night, and slew *them* there. 35 And Saul built an altar unto the LORD: the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD.

We have here an account of the distress of the children of Israel, even in the day of their triumphs. Such alloys are all present joys subject to. And such obstructions does many a good cause meet with, even when it seems most prosperous, through the mismanagement of instruments.

I. Saul forbade the people, under the penalty of a curse, to taste any food that day, v. 24. Here we will suppose, 1. That as king he had power to put his soldiers under this interdiction, and to bind it on with a curse; and therefore they submitted to it, and God so far owned it as to discover, by the lot, that Jonathan was the delinquent that had meddled with the accursed thing (though ignorantly), on which account God would not be at that time enquired of by them. 2. That he did it with a good intention, lest the people, who perhaps had been kept for some time at short allowance, when they found plenty of victuals in the deserted camp of the Philistines, should fall greedily upon that, and so lose time in pursuing the enemy, and some of them, it may be, glut themselves to such a degree as not to be fit for any more service that day. To prevent this, he forbade them to taste any food, and laid himself, it is likely, under the same restraint. And yet his making this severe order was, (1.) Impolitic and very unwise; for, if it gained time, it lost strength, for the pursuit. (2.) It was imperious, and disobliging to the people, and worse than *muzzling the mouth of the ox when he treads out the corn*. To forbid them to feast would have been commendable, but to forbid them so much as to taste, though ever so hungry, was barbarous. (3.) It was impious to enforce the prohibition with a curse and an oath. Had he no penalty less than an anathema wherewith to support his military discipline? Death for such a crime would have been too much, but especially death with a curse. Though superiors may ehide and correct, they may not curse their inferiors; our rule is, *Bless, and curse not*. When David speaks of an enemy he had that loved cursing perhaps he meant Saul, Ps. cix. 17, 18.

II. The people observed his order, but it had many inconveniences attending it. 1. The soldiers were tantalized; for, in their pursuit of the enemy, it happened that they went through a wood so full of wild honey that it dropped from the trees upon the ground, the Philistines having perhaps, in

their flight, broken in upon the honey-combs, for their own refreshment, and left them running. Canaan flowed with honey, and here is an instance of it. They sucked honey out of the rock, *the flinty rock* (Deut. xxxii. 13); yet, for fear of the curse, they did not so much as taste the honey, v. 25, 26. Those are worthy the name of Israelites that can deny themselves and their own appetites even when they are most craving, and the delights of sense most tempting, for fear of guilt and a curse, and the table becoming a snare. Let us never feed ourselves, much less feast ourselves, without fear. 2. Jonathan fell under the curse through ignorance. He heard not of the charge his father had given; for, having bravely forced the lines, he was then following the chase, and therefore might justly be looked upon as exempted from the charge and not intended in it. But it seems it was taken for granted, and he himself did not object against it afterwards, that it extended to him, though absent upon so good an occasion. He, not knowing any peril in it, took up a piece of a honey-comb, upon the end of his staff, and sucked it (v. 27), and was sensibly refreshed by it: *His eyes were enlightened*, which began to grow dim through hunger and faintness; it made his countenance look pleasant and cheerful, for it was such as a stander-by might discern (v. 29): *See how my eyes have been enlightened*. He thought no harm, nor feared any, till one of the people acquainted him with the order, and then he found himself in a snare. Many a good son has been thus entangled and distressed, in more ways than one, by the rashness of an inconsiderate father. Jonathan, for his part, lost the crown he was heir to by his father's folly, which, it may be, this was an ill omen of. 3. The soldiers were faint, and grew feeble, in the pursuit of the Philistines. Jonathan foresaw this would be the effect of it; their spirits would flag, and their strength would fail, for want of sustenance. Such is the nature of our bodies that they soon grow unfit for service if they be not supplied with fresh recruits. Daily work cannot be done without daily bread, which our Father in heaven graciously gives us. It is *bread that strengthens man's heart*; therefore Jonathan reasoned very well, *If the people had eaten freely, there would have been a much greater slaughter* (v. 30); but, as it was, they were *very faint, too much fatigued* (so the Chaldee), and began to think more of their meat than of their work. 4. The worst effect of all was that at evening, when the restraint was taken off and they returned to their food again, they were so greedy and eager upon it that they ate the flesh with the blood, expressly contrary to the law of God, v. 32. Two hungry meals, we say, make the third a glutton; it was so here. They would not stay to have their meat either duly killed (for they slew the cattle upon the ground, and did not hang them up, as they

used to do, that the blood might all run out of them) or duly dressed, but fell greedily upon it before it was half boiled or half roasted, v. 32. Saul, being informed of it, reproved them for the sin (v. 33.): *You have transgressed*; but did not, as he should have done, reflect upon himself as having been accessory to it, and having *made the Lord's people to transgress*. To put a stop to this irregularity, Saul ordered them to set up a great stone before him, and let all that had cattle to kill, for their present use, bring them thither, and kill them under his eye upon that stone (v. 33), and the people did so (v. 34), so easily were they restrained and reformed when their prince took care to do his part. If magistrates would but use their power as they might, people would be made better than they are with more ease than is imagined.

III. On this occasion Saul built an altar (v. 35), that he might offer sacrifice, either by way of acknowledgment of the victory they had obtained or by way of atonement for the sin they had been guilty of. *The same was the first altar that he built*, and perhaps the rolling of the great stone to kill the beasts on reminded him of converting it into an altar, else he would not have thought of it. Saul was turning aside from God, and yet now he began to build altars, being most zealous (as many are) for the form of godliness when he was denying the power of it. See Hos. viii. 14, *Israel has forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples*. Some read it, *He began to build that altar*; he laid the first stone, but was so hasty to pursue his victory that he could not stay to finish it.

36 And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God. 37 And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day. 38 And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. 39 For, as the LORD liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But *there was not a man among all the people that answered him*. 40 Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said

unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee. 41 Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped. 42 And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken. 43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die. 44 And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan. 45 And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not. 46 Then Saul went up from following the Philistines: and the Philistines went to their own place.

Here is, I. Saul's boasting against the Philistines. He proposed, as soon as his soldiers had got their suppers, to pursue them all night, and *not leave a man of them*, v. 36. Here he showed much zeal, but little discretion; for his army, thus fatigued, could as ill spare a night's sleep as a meal's meat. But it is common for rash and foolish men to consider nobody but themselves, and, so that they may but have their humour, not to care what hardships they put upon those that are under them. However, the people were so obsequious to their king that they would by no means oppose the motion, but resolved to make the best of it, and, if he will go on, they will follow him: *Do whatsoever seemeth good to thee*. Only the priest thought it convenient to go on with the devotions that were broken off abruptly (v. 19), and to consult the oracle: *Let us draw near hither unto God*. Princes and great men have need of such about them as will thus be their remembrancers, wherever they go, to take God along with them. And, when the priest proposed it, Saul could not for shame reject the proposal, but *asked counsel of God* (v. 37): "*Shall I go down after the Philistines? And shall I speed?*"

II. His falling foul on his son Jonathan: and the rest of this paragraph is wholly concerning him; for, while he is prosecuted, the Philistines make their escape. We know not what mischief may ensue upon one rash resolve.

1 God, by giving an intimation of his displeasure, put Saul upon searching for an accursed thing. When, by the priest, he consulted the oracle, God answered him not, v. 37. Note, When God denies our prayers it concerns us to enquire what the sin is that has provoked him to do so. *Let us see where the sin is, v. 38.* For God's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, but it is sin that separates between us and him. If God turns away our prayer, we have reason to suspect it is for some iniquity regarded in our hearts, which we are concerned to find out, that we may put it away, may mortify it, and put it to death. Saul swears by his Maker that whoever was the Achan that troubled the camp, by eating the forbidden fruit, should certainly die, though it were Jonathan himself, that is, though ever so dear to himself and the people, little thinking that Jonathan was the man (v. 39): *He shall surely die, the curse shall be executed upon him.* But none of the people answered him, that is, none of those who knew Jonathan had broken the order would inform against him.

2. Jonathan was discovered by lot to be the offender. Saul would have lots cast between himself and Jonathan on the one side, and the people on the other, perhaps because he was as confident of Jonathan's innocency in this matter as of his own, v. 40. The people, seeing him in a heat, durst not gain-say any thing he proposed, but acquiesced: *Do as seemeth good unto thee.* Before he cast lots, he prayed that *God would give a perfect lot* (v. 41), that is, make a full discovery of this matter, or, as it is in the margin, that he would show the innocent. This was with an air of impartial justice. Judges should desire that truth may come out, whoever may suffer by it. Lots should be cast with prayer, because they are a solemn appeal to Providence, and by them we beg of God to direct and determine us (Acts i. 24), for which reason some have condemned games that depend purely upon lot or chance as making too bold with a sacred thing. Jonathan at length was taken (v. 42), Providence designing hereby to countenance and support a lawful authority, and to put an honour upon the administration of public justice in general, reserving another way to bring off one that had done nothing worthy of death.

3. Jonathan ingenuously confesses the fact, and Saul, with an angry curse, passes sentence upon him. Jonathan denies not the truth, nor goes about to conceal it, only he thinks it hard that he must *die for it*, v. 43. He might very fairly have pleaded his invincible ignorance of the law, or have insisted upon his merit, but he submitted to the necessity with a great and generous mind: "God's and my father's will be done:" thus he showed as much valour in receiving the messengers of death himself as in sending them among the Philistines. It is as brave to yield in some cases as it is in

other cases to fight. Saul is not mollified by his filial submission nor the hardness of his case; but as one that affected to be thought firm to his word, and much more to his oath, even when it bound him hardest, with another imprecation he gives judgment upon Jonathan (v. 44): "*God do so and more also to me if I do not execute the law upon thee, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.*"

(1.) He passed this sentence too hastily, without consulting the oracle. Jonathan had a very good plea in arrest of the judgment. What he had done was not *malum in se—bad in itself*; and, as for the prohibition of it, he was ignorant of that, so that he could not be charged with rebellion or disobedience. (2.) He did it in fury. Had Jonathan been worthy to die, yet it would have become a judge, much more a father, to pass sentence with tenderness and compassion, and not with such an air of triumph, like a man perfectly divested of all humanity and natural affection. Justice is debased when it is administered with wrath and bitterness. (3.) He backed it with a curse upon himself if he did not see the sentence executed; and this curse did return upon his own head. Jonathan escaped, but God did so to Saul, and more also; for he was rejected of God and made anathema. Let none upon any occasion dare to use such imprecations as these, lest God say Amen to them, and *make their own tongues to fall upon them*, Ps. lxxviii. 8. This stone will return upon him that rolleth it. Yet we have reason to think that Saul's bowels yearned towards Jonathan, so that he really punished himself, and very justly, when he seemed so severe upon Jonathan. God made him feel the smart of his own rash edict, which might make him fear being again guilty of the like. By all these vexatious accidents God did likewise correct him for his presumption in offering sacrifice without Samuel. An expedition so ill begun could not end without some rebukes.

4. The people rescued Jonathan out of his father's hands, v. 45. Hitherto they had expressed themselves very observant of Saul. What seemed good to him they acquiesced in, v. 36, 40. But, when Jonathan is in danger, Saul's word is no longer a law to them, but with the utmost zeal they oppose the execution of his sentence: "*Shall Jonathan die—that blessing, that darling, of his country? Shall that life be sacrificed to a punctilio of law and honour which was so bravely exposed for the public service, and to which we owe our lives and triumphs? No, we will never stand by and see him thus treated whom God delights to honour.*" It is good to see Israelites zealous for the protection of those whom God has made instruments of public good. Saul had sworn that Jonathan should die, but they oppose their oath to his, and swear he shall not die: "*As the Lord liveth there shall not only not his head, but not a hair of his head fall to the*

ground;" they did not rescue him by violence, but by reason and resolution; and Josephus says they made their prayer to God that he might be loosed from the curse. They plead for him that *he has wrought with God this day*; that is, "he has owned God's cause, and God has owned his endeavours, and therefore his life is too precious to be thrown away upon a nicety." We may suppose Saul had not so perfectly forgotten the relation of a father but that he was willing enough to have Jonathan rescued, and well pleased to have that done which yet he would not do himself: and he that knows the heart of a father knows not how to blame him.

5. The design against the Philistines is quashed by this incident (v. 46): *Saul went up from following them*, and so an opportunity was lost of completing the victory. When Israel's shields are clashing with one another the public safety and service suffer by it.

47 So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them. 48 And he gathered a host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them. 49 Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melehi-shua: and the names of his two daughters were these; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal: 50 And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz: and the name of the captain of his host was Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51 And Kish was the father of Saul; and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. 52 And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him.

Here is a general account of Saul's court and camp. 1. Of his court and family, the names of his sons and daughters (v. 49), and of his wife and his cousin-german that was general of his army, v. 50. There is mention of another wife of Saul's (2 Sam. xxi. 8), Rizpah, a secondary wife, and of the children he had by her. 2. Of his camp and military actions. (1.) How he levied his army: *When he saw any strong valiant man, that was remarkably fit for service, he took him unto him*

(v. 52), as Samuel had told them the manner of the king would be (ch. viii. 11); and, if he must have a standing army, it was his prudence to fill it up with the ablest men he could make choice of. (2.) How he employed his army. He guarded his country against the insults of its enemies on every side, and prevented their incursions, v. 47, 48. It is supposed that he acted only defensively against those that used to invade the borders of Israel; and whithersoever he turned himself, as there was occasion, he vexed them, by checking and disappointing them. But the enemies he struggled most with were the Philistines, with whom he had sore war all his days, v. 52. He had little reason to be proud of his royal dignity, nor had any of his neighbours cause to envy him, for he had little enjoyment of himself after he took the kingdom. He could not vex his enemies without some vexation to himself, such thorns are crowns quilted with.

#### CHAP. XV.

In this chapter we have the final rejection of Saul from being king, for his disobedience to God's command in not utterly destroying the Amalekites. By his wars and victories he hoped to magnify and perpetuate his own name and honour, but, by his mismanagement of them, he ruined himself, and laid his honour in the dust. Here is, I. The commission God gave him to destroy the Amalekites, with a command to do it utterly, ver. 1-3. II. Saul's preparation for this expedition, ver. 4-6. III. His success, and partial execution of this commission, ver. 7-9. IV. His examination before Samuel, and sentence passed upon him, notwithstanding the many frivolous pleas he made to excuse himself, ver. 10-31. V. The slaying of Agag, ver. 32, 33. VI. Samuel's final farewell to Saul, v. 34, 35.

**S**AMUEL also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. 4 And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley. 6 And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye showed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 7 And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to

Shur, that is over against Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was good*, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was vile* and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

Here, I. Samuel, in God's name, solemnly requires Saul to be obedient to the command of God, and plainly intimates that he was now about to put him upon a trial, in one particular instance, whether he would be obedient or no, *v. 1.* And the making of this so expressly the trial of his obedience did very much aggravate his disobedience. 1. He reminds him of what God had done for him: "*The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be a king.*" God gave thee thy power, and therefore he expects thou shouldst use thy power for him. He put honour upon thee, and now thou must study how to do him honour. He made thee king over Israel, and now thou must plead Israel's cause and avenge their quarrels. Thou art advanced to command Israel, but know that thou art a subject to the God of Israel and must be commanded by him." Men's preferment, instead of releasing them from their obedience to God, obliges them so much the more to it. Samuel had himself been employed to anoint Saul, and therefore was the fitter to be sent with these orders to him. 2. He tells him, in general, that, in consideration of this, whatever God commanded him to do he was bound to do it: *Now therefore hearken to the voice of the Lord.* Note, God's favours to us lay strong obligations upon us to be obedient to him. This we must render, Ps. cxvi. 12.

II. He appoints him a particular piece of service, in which he must now show his obedience to God more than in any thing he had done yet. Samuel premises God's authority to the command: *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the Lord of all hosts, of Israel's hosts.* He also gives him a reason for the command, that the severity he must use might not seem hard: *I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, v. 2.* God had an ancient quarrel with the Amalekites, for the injuries they did to his people Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. We have the story, Exod. xvii. v. 8, &c., and the crime is aggravated, Deut. xxv. 18. He basely smote the hindmost of them, and feared not God. God then swore that he would have war with Amalek from generation to generation, and that in process of time he would utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek;

this is the work that Saul is now appointed to do (*v. 3*): "*Go and smite Amalek.*" Israel is now strong, and the measure of the iniquity of Amalek is now full: now go and make a full riddance of that devoted nation." He is expressly commanded to kill and slay all before him, *man and woman, infant and suckling*, and not spare them out of pity; also *ox and sheep, camel and ass*, and not spare them out of covetousness. Note, 1. Injuries done to God's Israel will certainly be reckoned for sooner or later, especially the opposition given them when they are coming out of Egypt. 2. God often bears long with those that are marked for ruin. The sentence passed is not executed speedily. 3. Though he bear long, he will not bear always. The year of recompence for the controversy of Israel will come at last. Though divine justice strikes slowly it strikes surely. 4. The longer judgment is delayed many times the more severe it is when it comes. 5. God chooses out instruments to do his work that are fittest for it. This was bloody work, and therefore Saul who was a rough and severe man must do it.

III. Saul hereupon musters his forces, and makes a descent upon the country of Amalek. It was an immense army that he brought into the field (*v. 4*): 200,000 *footmen*. When he was to engage the Philistines, and the success was hazardous, he had but 600 attending him, *ch. xiii. 15.* But now that he was to attack the Amalekites by express order from heaven, in which he was sure of victory, he had thousands at his call. But, whatever it was at other times, it was not now for the honour of Judah that their forces were numbered by themselves, for their quota was scandalously short (whatever was the reason), but a twentieth part of the whole, for they were but 10,000, when the other ten tribes (for I except Levi) brought into the field 200,000. The day of Judah's honour drew near, but had not yet come. Saul numbered them in *Telaim*, which signifies *lambs*. He numbered them *like lambs* (so the vulgar Latin), numbered them *by the paschal lambs* (so the Chaldec), allowing ten to a lamb, a way of numbering used by the Jews in the later times of their nation. Saul drew all his forces to the *city of Amalek*, that city that was their metropolis (*v. 5*), that he might provoke them to give him battle.

IV. He gave friendly advice to the Kenites to separate themselves from the Amalekites among whom they dwelt, while this execution was in doing, *v. 6.* Herein he did prudently and piously, and, it is probable, according to the direction Samuel gave him. The Kenites were of the family and kindred of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, a people that dwelt in tents, which made it easy for them, upon every occasion, to remove to other lands not appropriated. Many of them, at this time, dwelt among the Amalekites, where, though they dwelt in tents, they were



fortified by nature, for *they put their nest in a rock*, being hardy people that could live any where, and affected fastnesses, Num. xxiv. 21. Balaam had foretold that they should be wasted, Num. xxiv. 22. However Saul must not waste them. But, 1. He acknowledges the kindness of their ancestors to Israel, when they came out of Egypt. Jethro and his family had been very helpful and serviceable to them in their passage through the wilderness, had been to them instead of eyes, and this is remembered to their posterity many ages after. Thus a good man leaves the divine blessing for an inheritance to his children's children; those that come after us may be reaping the benefit of our good works when we are in our graves. God is not unrighteous to forget the kindnesses shown to his people; but they shall be remembered another day, at furthest in the great day, *and recompensed in the resurrection of the just. I was hungry, and you gave me meat.* God's remembering the kindness of the Kenites' ancestors in favour to them, at the same time when he was punishing the injuries done by the ancestors of the Amalekites, helped to clear the righteousness of God in that dispensation. If he entail favours, why may he not entail frowns? He espouses his people's cause, so as to *bless those that bless them*; and therefore so as to *curse those that curse them*, Num. xxiv. 9; Gen. xii. 3. They cannot themselves requite the kindnesses nor avenge the injuries done them, but God will do both. 2. He desires them to remove their tents from among the Amalekites: *Go, depart, get you down from among them.* When destroying judgments are abroad God will take care to separate between the precious and the vile, and to hide the meek of the earth in the day of his anger. It is dangerous being found in the company of God's enemies, and it is our duty and interest to *come out from among them*, lest we share in their sins and plagues, Rev. xviii. 4. The Jews have a saying, *Woe to the wicked man and woe to his neighbour.*

V. Saul prevailed against the Amalekites, for it was rather an execution of condemned malefactors than a war with contending enemies. The issue could not be dubious when the cause was just and the call so clear: *He smote them (v. 7), utterly destroyed them, v. 8.* Now they paid dearly for the sin of their ancestors. God sometimes *lays up iniquity for the children.* They were idolaters, and were guilty of many other sins, for which they deserved to fall under the wrath of God; yet, when God would reckon with them, he fastened upon the sin of their ancestors in abusing his Israel as the ground of his quarrel. Lord, How unsearchable are thy judgments, yet how incontestable is thy righteousness!

VI. Yet he did his work by halves, v. 9.

1. He spared *Aaag*, because he was a king like himself, and perhaps in hope to get a

great ransom for him. 2. He spared the best of the cattle, and destroyed only the refuse, that was good for little. Many of the people, we may suppose, made their escape, and took their effects with them into other countries, and therefore we read of Amalekites after this; but that could not be helped. It was Saul's fault that he did not destroy such as came to his hands and were in his power. That which was now destroyed was in effect sacrificed to the justice of God, as the God to whom vengeance belongeth; and for Saul to think the torn and the sick, the lame and the lean, good enough for that, while he reserved for his own fields and his own table the firstlings and the fat, was really to honour himself more than God.

10 Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, 11 It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. 12 And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. 14 And Samuel said, What *meanest* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. 16 Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. 17 And Samuel said, When thou *wast* little in thine own sight, *wast* thou not *made* the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? 18 And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. 19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the

spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? 20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. 22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Saul is here called to account by Samuel concerning the execution of his commission against the Amalekites; and remarkable instances we are here furnished with of the strictness of the justice of God and the treachery and deceitfulness of the heart of man. We are here told,

1. What passed between God and Samuel, in secret, upon this occasion, v. 10, 11. 1. God determines Saul's rejection, and acquaints Samuel with it: *It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king.* Repentance in God is not, as it is in us, a change of his mind, but a change of his method or dispensation. He does not alter his will, but wills an alteration. The change was in Saul: *He has turned back from following me;* this construction God put upon the partiality of his obedience, and the prevalence of his covetousness. And hereby he did himself make God his enemy. God repented that he had given Saul the kingdom and the honour and power that belonged to it: but he never repented that he had given any man wisdom and grace, and his fear and love; these gifts and callings of God are without repentance. 2. Samuel laments and deprecates it. *It grieved Samuel* that Saul had forfeited God's favour, and that God had resolved to cast him off; and he *cried unto the Lord all night*, spent a whole night in interceding for him, that this decree might not go forth against him. When others were in their beds sleeping, he was upon his knees praying and wrestling with God. He did not thus deprecate his own exclusion from the government; nor was he secretly pleased, as many a one would have been, that Saul, who succeeded him, was so

soon laid aside, but on the contrary prayed earnestly for his establishment, so far was he from desiring that woeful day. The rejection of sinners is the grief of good people; God delights not in their death, nor should we.

II. What passed between Samuel and Saul in public. Samuel, being sent of God to him with these heavy tidings, went, as Ezekiel, in *hitterness of soul*, to meet him, perhaps according to an appointment when Saul went forth on this expedition, for Saul had come to Gilgal (v. 12), the place where he was made king (ch. xi. 15), and where now he would have been confirmed if he had approved himself well in this trial of his obedience. But Samuel was informed that Saul had set up a triumphal arch, or some monument of his victory, at Carmel, a city in the mountains of Judah, seeking his own honour more than the honour of God, for he set up this place (or *hand*, as the word is) for himself (he had more need to have been repenting of his sin and making his peace with God than boasting of his victory), and also that he had marched in great state to Gilgal, for this seems to be intimated in the manner of expression: *He has gone about, and passed on, and gone down*, with a great deal of pomp and parade. There Samuel gave him the meeting, and,

1. Saul makes his boast to Samuel of his obedience, because that was the thing by which he was now to signalize himself (v. 13): *"Blessed be thou of the Lord, for thou sentest me upon a good errand, in which I have had great success, and I have performed the commandment of the Lord."* It is very likely, if his conscience had not flown in his face at this time and charged him with disobedience, he would not have been so forward to proclaim his obedience; for by this he hoped to prevent Samuel's reproving him. Thus sinners think, by justifying themselves, to escape being *judged of the Lord*; whereas the only way to do that is by *judging ourselves*. Those that boast most of their religion may justly be suspected of partiality and hypocrisy in it.

2. Samuel convicts him by a plain demonstration of his disobedience. *"Hast thou performed the commandment of the Lord? What means then the bleating of the sheep?"* v. 14. Saul would needs have it thought that God Almighty was wonderfully beholden to him for the good service he had done; but Samuel shows him that God was so far from being a debtor to him that he had just cause of action against him, and produces for evidence *the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen*, which perhaps Saul appointed to bring up the rear of his triumph, but Samuel appeals to them as witnesses against him. He needed not go far to disprove his professions. The noise the cattle made (like *the rust of the sileer*, Jam. v. 3) would be a *witness against him*. Note, It is no new thing for the plausible profes-

sions and protestations of hypocrites to be contradicted and disproved by the most plain and undeniable evidence. Many boast of their obedience to the command of God; but what mean then their indulgence of the flesh, their love of the world, their passion and uncharitableness, and their neglect of holy duties, which witness against them?

3. Saul insists upon his own justification against this charge, *v.* 15. The fact he cannot deny; the sheep and oxen were brought from the Amalekites. But, (1.) It was not his fault, for the people spared them; as if they durst have done it without the express orders of Saul, when they knew it was against the express orders of Samuel. Note, Those that are willing to justify themselves are commonly very forward to condemn others, and to lay the blame upon any rather than take it to themselves. Sin is a brat that nobody cares to have laid at his doors. It is the sorry subterfuge of an impenitent heart, that will not confess its guilt, to lay the blame on those that were tempters, or partners, or only followers in it. (2.) It was with a good intention: "It was to sacrifice to the Lord thy God. He is thy God, and thou wilt not be against anything that is done, as this is, for his honour." This was a false plea, for both Saul and the people designed their own profit in sparing the cattle. But, if it had been true, it would still have been frivolous, for God hates robbery for burnt-offering. God appointed these cattle to be sacrificed to him in the field, and therefore will give those no thanks that bring them to be sacrificed at his altar; for he will be served in his own way, and according to the rule he himself has prescribed. Nor will a good intention justify a bad action.

4. Samuel overrules, or rather overlooks, his plea, and proceeds, in God's name, to give judgment against him. He premises his authority. What he was about to say was what the Lord had said to him (*v.* 16), otherwise he would have been far from passing so severe a censure upon him. Those who complain that their ministers are too harsh with them should remember that, while they keep to the word of God, they are but messengers, and must say as they are bidden, and therefore be willing, as Saul himself here was, that they should say on. Samuel delivers his message faithfully. (1.) He reminds Saul of the honour God had done him in making him king (*v.* 17), when he was little in his own sight. God regarded the lowliness of his state and rewarded the lowliness of his spirit. Note, Those that are advanced to honour and wealth ought often to remember their mean beginnings, that they may never think highly of themselves, but always study to do great things for the God that has advanced them. (2.) He lays before him the plainness of the orders he was to execute (*v.* 18): *The Lord sent thee on a journey*; so easy was the service,

and so certain the success, that it was rather to be called a *journey* than a *war*. The work was honourable, to destroy the sworn enemies of God and Israel; and had he denied himself, and set aside the consideration of his own profit so far as to have destroyed all that belonged to Amalek, he would have been no loser by it at last, nor have gone this *warfare on his own charges*. God would no doubt have made it up to him, so that he should have no need of spoil. And therefore, (3.) He shows him how inexcusable he was in aiming to make a profit of this expedition, and to enrich himself by it (*v.* 19): "*Wherefore then didst thou fly upon the spoil*, and convert that to thy own use which was to have been destroyed for God's honour?" See what evil the love of money is the root of; but see what is the sinfulness of sin, and that in it which above any thing else makes it evil in the sight of the Lord. It is disobedience: *Thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord*.

5. Saul repeats his vindication of himself, as that which, in defiance of conviction, he resolved to abide by, *v.* 20, 21. He denies the charge (*v.* 20): "*Yea, I have obeyed, I have done all I should do*;" for he had done all which he thought he needed to do, so much wiser was he in his own eyes than God himself. God had him kill all, and yet he puts in among the instances of his obedience that he had brought Agag alive, which he thought was as good as if he had killed him. Thus carnal deceitful hearts think to excuse themselves from God's commandments with their own equivalents. He insists upon it that he has *utterly destroyed the Amalekites* themselves, which was the main thing intended; but, as to the spoil, he owns it should have been *utterly destroyed*; so that he knew his *Lord's will*, and was under no mistake about the command. But he thought that would be wilful waste; the cattle of the Midianites was taken for a prey in Moses's time (*Num.* xxxi. 32, &c.), and why not the cattle of the Amalekites now? Better it should be a prey to the Israelites than to the fowls of the air and the wild beasts; and therefore he connived at the people's carrying it away. But it was their doing and not his; and, besides, it was for *sacrifice to the Lord* here at Gilgal, whether they were now bringing them. See what a hard thing it is to convince the children of disobedience of their sin and to strip them of their fig-leaves.

6. Samuel gives a full answer to his apology, since he did insist upon it, *v.* 22, 23. He appeals to his own conscience: *Has the Lord as great delight in sacrifices as in obedience?* Though Saul was not a man of any great acquaintance with religion, yet he could not but know this, (1.) That nothing is so pleasing to God as obedience, no, not sacrifice and offering, and the fat of rams. See here what we should seek and aim at in all the exercises of religion, even acceptance

with God, that he may delight in what we do. If God be well pleased with us and our services, we are happy, we have gained our point; but otherwise to *what purpose is it?* Isa. i. 11. Now here we are plainly told that humble, sincere, and conscientious obedience to the will of God, is more pleasing and acceptable to him than *all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*. A careful conformity to moral precepts recommends us to God more than all ceremonial observances, Mic. vi. 6—8; Hos. vi. 6. Obedience is enjoined by the eternal law of nature, but sacrifice only by a positive law. Obedience was the law of innocency, but sacrifice supposes sin come into the world, and is but a feeble attempt to take that away which obedience would have prevented. God is more glorified and self more denied by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burnt upon the altar than to bring *every high thought into obedience* to God and the will subject to his will. Obedience is the glory of angels (Ps. ciii. 20), and it will be ours. (2.) That nothing is so provoking to God as disobedience, setting up our wills in competition with his. This is here called *rebellion* and *stubbornness*, and is said to be as bad as *witchcraft* and *idolatry*, v. 23. It is as bad to set up other gods as to live in disobedience to the true God. Those that are governed by their own corrupt inclinations, in opposition to the command of God, do, in effect, consult the *teraphim* (as the word here is for idolatry) or the diviners. It was disobedience that made us all sinners (Rom. v. 19), and this is the malignity of sin, that it is the *transgression of the law*, and consequently it is *enmity to God*, Rom. viii. 7. Saul was a king, but, if he disobey the command of God, his royal dignity and power will not excuse him from the guilt of rebellion and stubbornness. It is not the rebellion of the people against their prince, but of a prince against God, that this text speaks of.

7. He reads his doom: in short, "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, hast despised it* (so the Chaldee), *hast made nothing of it* (so the LXX.), *hast cast off the government of it, therefore he has rejected thee, despised and made nothing of thee, but cast thee off from being king.* He that made thee king has determined to unmake thee again." Those are unfit and unworthy to rule over men who are not willing that God should rule over them.

24 And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. 26 And Samuel

said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. 27 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. 28 And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, *that is better than thou.* 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. 30 Then he said, I have sinned: *yet* honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. 31 So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.

Saul is at length brought to put himself into the dress of a penitent; but it is too evident that he only acts the part of a penitent, and is not one indeed. Observe,

I. How poorly he expressed his repentance. It was with much ado that he was made sensible of his fault, and not till he was threatened with being deposed. This touched him in a tender part. Then he began to relent, and not till then. When Samuel told him he was *rejected from being king*, then he said, *I have sinned*, v. 24. His confession was not free nor ingenuous, but extorted by the rack, and forced from him. We observe here several bad signs of the hypocrisy of his repentance, and that it came short even of Ahab's. 1. He made his application to Samuel only, and seemed most solicitous to stand right in his opinion and to gain his favour. He makes a little god of him, only to preserve his reputation with the people, because they all knew Samuel to be a prophet, and the man that had been the instrument of his preferment. Thinking it would please Samuel, and be a sort of bribe to him, he puts it into his confession: *I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy word*; as if he had been in God's stead, v. 24. David, though convicted by the ministry of Nathan, yet, in his confession, has his eye to God alone, not to Nathan. Ps. li. 4. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned.* But Saul, ignorantly enough, confesses his sin as a transgression of Samuel's word; whereas his word was no other than a declaration of the *commandment of the Lord*. He also applies to Samuel for forgiveness (v. 25): *I pray thee, pardon my sin*; as if any could forgive sin but God only. Those wretchedly deceive themselves who, when they have

fallen into scandalous sin, think it enough to make their peace with the church and their ministers, by the show and plausible profession of repentance, without taking care to make their peace with God by the sincerity of it. The most charitable construction we can put upon this of Saul is to suppose that he looked upon Samuel as a sort of mediator between him and God, and intended an address to God in his application to him. However it was very weak. 2. He excused his fault even in the confession of it, and that is never the fashion of a true penitent (v. 24): *I did it because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.* We have reason enough to think that it was purely his own doing and not the people's; however, if they were forward to do it, it is plain, by what we have read before, that he knew how to keep up his authority among them and did not stand in any awe of them. So that the excuse was false and frivolous; whatever he pretended, he did not really fear the people. But it is common for sinners, in excusing their faults, to plead the thoughts and workings of their own minds, because those are things which, how groundless soever, no man can disprove; but they forget that God searcheth the heart. 3. All his care was to save his credit, and preserve his interest in the people, lest they should revolt from him, or at least despise him. Therefore he courts Samuel with so much earnestness (v. 25) to turn again with him, and assist in a public thanksgiving for the victory. Very importunate he was in this matter when he laid hold on the skirt of his mantle to detain him (v. 27), not that he cared for Samuel, but he feared that if Samuel forsook him the people would do so too. Many seem zealously affected to good ministers and good people only for the sake of their own interest and reputation, while in heart they hate them. But his expression was very gross when he said (v. 30), *I have sinned, yet honour me, I pray thee, before my people.* Is this the language of a penitent? No, but the contrary: *"I have sinned, shame me now, for to me belongs shame, and no man can loathe me so much as I loathe myself."* Yet how often do we meet with the copies of this hypocrisy of Saul! It is very common for those who are convicted of sin to show themselves very solicitous to be honoured before the people. Whereas he that has lost the honour of an innocent can pretend to no other than that of a penitent, and it is the honour of a penitent to take shame to himself.

II. How little he got by these thin shows of repentance. What point did he gain by them? 1. Samuel repeated the sentence passed upon him, so far was he from giving any hopes of the repeal of it, v. 26, the same with v. 23. *He that covers his sins shall never prosper,* Prov. xxviii. 13. Samuel refused to turn back with him, but *turned about to go away,* v. 27. As the thing appeared to

him upon the first view, he thought it altogether unfit for him so far to countenance one whom God had rejected as to join with him in giving thanks to God for a victory which was made to serve rather Saul's covetousness than God's glory. Yet afterwards he did turn again with him (v. 31), upon further thoughts, and probably by divine direction, either to prevent a mutiny among the people or perhaps not to do honour to Saul (for, though Saul worshipped the Lord, v. 31, it is not said Samuel presided in that worship), but to do justice on Agag, v. 32. 2. He illustrated the sentence by a sign, which Saul himself, by his rudeness, gave occasion for. When Samuel was turning from him he tore his clothes to detain him (v. 27), so loth was he to part with the prophet; but Samuel put a construction upon this accident which none but a prophet could do. He made it to signify the *rending of the kingdom* from him (v. 28), and that, like this, was his own doing. "He hath rent it from thee, and *given it to a neighbour better than thou,*" namely, to David, who afterwards, upon occasion, cut off the skirt of Saul's robe (1 Sam. xxiv. 4), upon which Saul said (1 Sam. xxiv. 20), *I know that thou shalt surely be king,* perhaps remembering this sign, the tearing of the skirt of Samuel's mantle. 3. He ratified it by a solemn declaration of its being irreversible (v. 29): *The Strength of Israel will not lie. The Eternity or Victory of Israel,* so some read it; *the holy One,* so the Arabic; *the most noble One,* so the Syriac; *the triumphant King of Israel,* so bishop Patrick. "He is determined to depose thee, and he will not change his purpose. *He is not a man that he should repent.*" Men are fickle and alter their minds, feeble and cannot effect their purposes; something happens which they could not foresee, by which their measures are broken. But with God it is not so. God has sometimes repented of the evil which he thought to have done, upon the sinner's repenting; but here repentance was hidden from Saul, and therefore hidden from God's eyes.

32 Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. 33 And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. 34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. 35 And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his

death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Samuel, as a prophet, is here set over kings, Jer. i. 10.

I. He destroys king Agag, doubtless by such special direction from heaven as none now can pretend to. He *hewed Agag in pieces*. Some think he only ordered it to be done; or perhaps he did it with his own hands, as a sacrifice to God's injured justice (v. 33), and sacrifices used to be cut in pieces. Now observe in this,

1. How Agag's present vain hopes were frustrated: He *came delicately*, in a stately manner, to show that he was a king, and therefore to be treated with respect, or in a soft effeminate manner, as one never used to hardship, that *could not set the sole of his foot to the ground for tenderness and delicacy* (Deut. xxviii. 56), to move compassion: and he said, "Surely, now that the heat of the battle is over, the *bitterness of death is past*, v. 32. Having escaped the sword of Saul," that man of war, he thought he was in no danger from Samuel, an old prophet, a man of peace. Note, (1.) There is bitterness in death, it is terrible to nature. *Surely death is bitter*, so divers versions read those words of Agag; as the LXX. read the former clause, *He came trembling*. Death will dismay the stoutest heart. (2.) Many think the bitterness of death is past when it is not so; they put that evil day far from them which is very near. True believers may, through grace, say this, upon good grounds, though death be not past, the bitterness of it is. *O death! where is thy sting?*

2. How his former wicked practices were now punished. Samuel calls him to account, not only for the sins of his ancestors, but his own sins: *Thy sword has made women childless*, v. 33. He trod in the steps of his ancestors' cruelty, and those under him, it is likely, did the same; justly therefore is all the righteous blood shed by Amalek required of this generation, Matt. xxiii. 36. Agag, that was delicate and luxurious himself, was cruel and barbarous to others. It is commonly so: those who are indulgent of their appetites are not less indulgent of their passions. But blood will be reckoned for; even kings must account to the King of kings for the guiltless blood they shed or cause to be shed. It was that crime of king Manasseh which the Lord would not pardon, 2 Kings xxiv. 4. See Rev. xiii. 10.

II. He deserts king Saul, takes leave of him (v. 31), and *never came any more to see him* (v. 35), to advise or assist him in any of his affairs, because Saul did not desire his company nor would he be advised by him. He looked upon him as rejected of God, and therefore he forsook him. Though he might sometimes see him accidentally (as *ch* xix

24), yet he never came to see him out of kindness or respect. Yet he *mourned for Saul*, thinking it a very lamentable thing that a man who stood so fair for great things should ruin himself so foolishly. He mourned for the bad state of the country, to which Saul was likely to have been so great a blessing, but now would prove a curse and a plague. He mourned for his everlasting state, having no hopes of bringing him to repentance. When he wept for him, it is likely, he made supplication, but the Lord had *repented that he had made Saul king*, and resolved to undo that work of his, so that Samuel's prayers prevailed not for him. Observe, We must mourn for the rejection of sinners, 1. Though we withdraw from them, and dare not converse familiarly with them. Thus the prophet determines to leave his people and go from them, and yet to *weep day and night for them*, Jer. ix. 1, 2. 2. Though they do not mourn for themselves. Saul seems unconcerned at the tokens of God's displeasure which he lay under, and yet Samuel mourns day and night for him. Jerusalem was secure when Christ wept over it.

#### CHAP. XVI.

At this chapter begins the story of David, one that makes as great a figure in the sacred story as almost any of the worthies of the Old Testament, one that both with his sword and with his pen served the honour of God and the interests of Israel as much as most ever did, and was as illustrious a type of Christ. Here, I. Samuel is appointed and commissioned to anoint a king among the sons of Jesse at Bethlehem, ver. 1-5. II. All his elder sons are passed by and David the youngest is pitched upon and anointed, ver. 6-13. III. Saul growing melancholy, David is pitched upon to release him by music, ver. 14-23. Thus small are the beginnings of that great man.

**A**ND THE LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. 2 And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. 3 And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me *him* whom I name unto thee. 4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5 And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

Samuel had retired to his own house in Ramah, with a resolution not to appear any more in public business, but to addict himself wholly to the instructing and training up of the sons of the prophets, over whom he presided, as we find, *ch. xix. 20*. He promised himself more satisfaction in young prophets than in young princes; and we do not find that, to his dying day, God called him out to any public action relating to the state, but only here to anoint David.

I. God reproves him for continuing so long to mourn for the rejection of Saul. He does not blame him for mourning on that occasion, but for exceeding in his sorrow: *How long wilt thou mourn for Saul? v. 1*. We do not find that he mourned at all for the setting aside of his own family and the deposing of his own sons; but for the rejecting of Saul and his seed he mourns without measure, for the former was done by the people's foolish discontent, this by the righteous wrath of God. Yet he must find time to recover himself, and not go mourning to his grave, 1. Because God has rejected him, and he ought to acquiesce in the divine justice, and forget his affection to Saul; if God will be glorified in his ruin, Samuel ought to be satisfied. Besides, to what purpose should he weep? The decree has gone forth, and all his prayers and tears cannot prevail for the reversing of it, 2 Sam. xii. 22, 23. 2. Because Israel shall be no loser by it, and Samuel must prefer the public welfare before his own private affection to his friend. "Mourn not for Saul, for I have provided me a king. The people provided themselves a king and he proved bad, now I will provide myself one, a man after my own heart." See Ps. lxxxix. 20; Acts xiii. 22. "If Saul be rejected, yet Israel shall not be as sheep having no shepherd. I have another in store for them; let thy joy of him swallow up thy grief for the rejected prince."

II. He sends him to Bethlehem, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, a person probably not unknown to Samuel. *Fill thy horn with oil*. Saul was anointed with a glass vial of oil, scanty and brittle, David with a horn of oil, which was more plentiful and durable; hence we read of a *horn of salvation in the house of his servant David*, Luke i. 69.

III. Samuel objects the peril of going on this errand (*v. 2*): *If Saul hear it, he will kill me*. By this it appears, 1. That Saul had grown very wicked and outrageous since his rejection, else Samuel would not have mentioned this. What impiety would he not be guilty of who durst kill Samuel? 2. That Samuel's faith was not so strong as one would have expected, else he would not have thus feared the rage of Saul. Would not he that sent him protect him and bear him out? But the best men are not perfect in their faith, nor will fear be wholly cast out any where on this side heaven. But this may be understood as Samuel's desire of direction

from heaven how to manage this matter prudently, so as not to expose himself, or any other, more than needed.

IV. God orders him to cover his design with a sacrifice: *Say, I have come to sacrifice*; and it was true he did, and it was proper that he should, when he came to anoint a king, *ch. xi. 15*. As a prophet, he might sacrifice when and where God appointed him; and it was not at all inconsistent with the laws of truth to say he came to sacrifice when really he did so, though he had also a further end, which he thought fit to conceal. Let him give notice of a sacrifice, and invite Jesse (who, it is probable, was the principal man of the city) and his family to come to the feast upon the sacrifice; and, says God, *I will show thee what thou shalt do*. Those that go about God's work in God's way shall be directed step by step, wherever they are at a loss, to do it in the best manner.

V. Samuel went accordingly to Bethlehem, not in pomp, or with any retinue, only a servant to lead the heifer which he was to sacrifice; yet *the elders of Bethlehem trembled at his coming*, fearing it was an indication of God's displeasure against them and that he came to denounce some judgment for the iniquities of the place. Guilt causes fear. Yet indeed it becomes us to stand in awe of God's messengers, and to tremble at his word. Or they feared it might be an occasion of Saul's displeasure against them, for probably they knew how much he was exasperated at Samuel, and feared he would pick a quarrel with them for entertaining him. They asked him, "*Comest thou peaceably?*" Art thou in peace thyself, and not flying from Saul? Art thou at peace with us, and not come with any message of wrath? We should all covet earnestly to stand upon good terms with God's prophets, and dread having the word of God, or their prayers, against us. When the Son of David was born king of the Jews all Jerusalem was troubled, Matt. ii. 3. Samuel kept at home, and it was a strange thing to see him so far from his own house; they therefore concluded it must needs be some extraordinary occasion that brought him, and feared the worst till he satisfied them (*v. 5*): "*I come peaceably, for I come to sacrifice*, not with a message of wrath against you, but with the methods of peace and reconciliation; and therefore you may bid me welcome and need not fear my coming; therefore *sanctify yourselves*, and prepare to join with me in the sacrifice, that you may have the benefit of it." Note, Before solemn ordinances there must be a solemn preparation. When we are to offer spiritual sacrifices it concerns us, by sequestering ourselves from the world and renewing the dedication of ourselves to God, to sanctify ourselves. When our Lord Jesus came into the world, though men had reason enough to tremble, fearing that his errand was to condemn the world, yet he gave full

assurance that he came peaceably, for he came to sacrifice, and he brought his offering along with him: *A body hast thou prepared me.* Let us sanctify ourselves, that we may have an interest in his sacrifice. Note, Those that come to sacrifice should come peaceably; religious exercises must not be performed tumultuously.

VI. He had a particular regard to Jesse and his sons, for with them his private business lay, with which, it is likely, he acquainted Jesse at his first coming, and took up his lodging at his house. He spoke to all the elders to *sanctify themselves*, but he *sanctified Jesse and his sons* by praying with them and instructing them. Perhaps he had acquaintance with them before, and it appears (*ch. xx. 29*, where we read of the sacrifices that family had) that it was a devout religious family. Samuel assisted them in their family preparations for the public sacrifice, and, it is probable, chose out David, and anointed him, at the family-solemnities, before the sacrifice was offered or the holy feast solemnized. Perhaps he offered private sacrifices, like Job, *according to the number of them all* (*Job i. 5*), and, under colour of that, called for them all to appear before him. When signal blessings are coming into a family they ought to sanctify themselves.

6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him. 7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. 9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. 10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. 11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. 12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint

him: for this is he. 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

If the sons of Jesse were told that God would provide himself a king among them (as he had said, *v. 1*), we may well suppose they all made the best appearance they could, and each hoped he should be the man; but here we are told,

1. How all the elder sons, who stood fairest for the preferment, were passed by.

1. Eliab, the eldest, was privately presented first to Samuel, probably none being present but Jesse only, and Samuel thought he must needs be the man: *Surely this is the Lord's anointed, v. 6*. The prophets themselves, when they spoke from under the divine direction, were as liable to mistake as other men; as Nathan, *2 Sam. vii. 3*. But God rectified the prophet's mistake by a secret whisper to his mind: *Look not on his countenance, v. 7*. It was strange that Samuel, who had been so wretchedly disappointed in Saul, whose countenance and stature recommended him as much as any man's could, should be so forward to judge of a man by that rule. When God would please the people with a king he chose a comely man; but, when he would have one after his own heart, he should not be chosen by the outside. Men judge by the sight of the eyes, but God does not, *1sa. xi. 3*. *The Lord looks on the heart*, that is, (1.) He knows it. We can tell how men look, but he can tell what they are. Man looks on the eyes (so the original word is), and is pleased with the liveliness and sprightliness that appear in them; but God looks on the heart, and sees the thoughts and intents of that. (2.) He judges of men by it. The good disposition of the heart, the holiness or goodness of that, recommends us to God, and is *in his sight of great price* (*1 Pet. iii. 4*), not the majesty of the look, or the strength and stature of the body. Let us reckon that to be true beauty which is within, and judge of men, as far as we are capable, by their minds, not their mien.

2. When Eliab was set aside, Abinadab and Shammah, and, after them, four more of the sons of Jesse, seven in all, were presented to Samuel, as likely for his purpose; but Samuel, who now attended more carefully than he did at first to the divine direction, rejected them all: *The Lord has not chosen these, v. 8, 10*. Men dispose of their honours and estates to their sons according to their seniority of age and priority of birth, but God does not. *The elder shall serve the younger*. Had it been left to Samuel, or Jesse, to make the choice, one of these would certainly have been chosen; but God will magnify his sovereignty in passing by some that were most



promising as well as in fastening on others that were less so.

11. How David at length was pitched upon. He was the youngest of all the sons of Jesse; his name signifies *beloved*, for he was a type of the beloved Son. Observe, 1. How he was in the fields, *keeping the sheep* (v. 11), and was left there, though there was a sacrifice and a feast at his father's house. The youngest are commonly the fondlings of the family, but, it should seem, David was least set by of all the sons of Jesse; either they did not discern or did not duly value the excellent spirit he was of. Many a great genius lies buried in obscurity and contempt; and God often exalts those whom men despise and gives *abundant honour to that part which lacked*. The Son of David was he whom men despised, *the stone which the builders refused*, and yet he has *a name above every name*. David was taken from *following the ewes to feed Jacob* (Ps. lxxviii. 71), as Moses from keeping the flock of Jethro, an instance of his humility and industry, both which God delights to put honour upon. We should think a military life, but God saw a pastoral life (which gives advantage for contemplation and communion with heaven), the best preparative for kingly power, at least for those graces of the Spirit which are necessary to the due discharge of that trust which attends it. David was keeping sheep, though it was a time of sacrifice; for there is mercy that takes precedence of sacrifice. 2. How earnest Samuel was to have him sent for: "*We will not sit down to meat*" (perhaps it was not the feast upon the sacrifice, but a common meal) "*till he come hither*; for, if all the rest be rejected, this must be he." He that was designed not to sit at table at all is now waited for as the principal guest. If God will exalt those of low degree, who can hinder? 3. What appearance he made when he did come. No notice is taken of his clothing. No doubt that was according to his employment, mean and coarse, as shepherds' coats commonly are, and he did not change his clothes as Joseph did (Gen. xli. 14); but he had a very honest look, not stately, as Saul's, but sweet and lovely: *He was ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to* (v. 12), that is, he had a clear complexion, a good eye, and a lovely face; the features were extraordinary, and there was something in his looks that was very charming. Though he was so far from using any art to help his beauty that his employment exposed it to the sun and wind, yet nature kept its own, and, by the sweetness of his aspect, gave manifest indications of an amiable temper and disposition of mind. Perhaps his modest blush, when he was brought before Samuel, and received by him with surprising respect, made him look much the handsomer. 4. The anointing of him. The Lord told Samuel in his ear (as he had done, *ch. ix. 15*) that this was he whom he must anoint, v. 12.

Samuel objects not to the meanness of his education, his youth, or the little respect he had in his own family, but, in obedience to the divine command, took his horn of oil and *anointed him* (v. 13), signifying thereby, (1.) A divine designation to the government, after the death of Saul, of which hereby he gave him a full assurance. Not that he was at present invested with the royal power, but it was entailed upon him, to come to him in due time. (2.) A divine communication of gifts and graces, to fit him for the government, and make him a type of him who was to be the Messiah, the anointed One, who received the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure. He is said to be anointed *in the midst of his brethren*, who yet, possibly, did not understand it as a designation to the government, and therefore did not envy David (as Joseph's brethren did him), because they saw no further marks of dignity put upon him, no, not so much as a coat of divers colours. But bishop Patrick reads it, *He anointed him from the midst of his brethren*, that is, he singled him out from the rest, and privately anointed him, but with a charge to keep his own counsel, and not to let his own brethren know it, as by what we find (*ch. xvii. 28*), it should seem, Eliab did not. It is computed that David was now about twenty years old; if so, his troubles by Saul lasted ten years, for he was thirty years old when Saul died. Dr. Lightfoot reckons that he was about twenty-five, and that his troubles lasted but five years. 5. The happy effects of this anointing: *The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward*, v. 13. The anointing of him was not an empty ceremony, but a divine power went along with that instituted sign, and he found himself inwardly advanced in wisdom, and courage, and concern for the public, with all the qualifications of a prince, though not at all advanced in his outward circumstances. This would abundantly satisfy him that his election was of God. The best evidence of our being predestinated to the kingdom of glory is our being sealed with the Spirit of promise, and our experience of a work of grace in our own hearts. Some think that his courage, by which he slew the lion and the bear, and his extraordinary skill in music, were the effects and evidences of the Spirit's coming upon him. However, this made him the sweet psalmist of Israel, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. Samuel, having done this, went to Ramah in safety, and we never read of him again but once (*ch. xix. 18*), till we read of his death; now he retired to die in peace, since his eyes had seen the salvation, even the sceptre brought into the tribe of Judah.

14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. 15 And Saul's servants said unto him,

Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. 16 Let our lord now command thy servants, *which are* before thee, to seek out a man, *who is* a cunning player on a harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. 17 And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring *him* to me. 18 Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, *that is* cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD *is* with him. 19 Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, *which is* with the sheep. 20 And Jesse took an ass *laden* with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent *them* by David his son unto Saul. 21 And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer. 22 And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. 23 And it came to pass, when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

We have here Saul falling and David rising.

I. Here is Saul made a terror to himself (v. 14): *The Spirit of the Lord departed from him.* He having forsaken God and his duty, God, in a way of righteous judgment, withdrew from him those assistances of the good Spirit with which he was directed, animated, and encouraged in his government and wars. He lost all his good qualities. This was the effect of his rejecting God, and an evidence of his being rejected by him. Now God took his mercy from Saul (as it is expressed, 2 Sam. vii. 15); for, when the Spirit of the Lord departs from us, all good goes. When men grieve and quench the Spirit, by wilful sin, he departs, and will not always strive. The consequence of this was that *an evil spirit from God troubled him.* Those that drive the good Spirit away from them do of course become a prey to the evil spirit. If

God and his grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us. The devil, by the divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul, by means of the corrupt humours of his body and passions of his mind. He grew fretful, and peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, ever and anon starting and trembling; he was sometimes, says Josephus, as if he had been choked or strangled, and a perfect demoniac by fits. This made him unfit for business, precipitate in his counsels, the contempt of his enemies, and a burden to all about him.

II. Here is David made a physician to Saul, and by this means brought to court, a physician that helped him against the worst of diseases, when none else could. David was newly anointed privately to the kingdom. It would be of use to him to go to court and see the world; and here his doing so is brought about for him without any contrivance of his own or his friends. Note, Those whom God designs for any service his providence shall concur with his grace to prepare and qualify for it. Saul is distempered; his servants have the honesty and courage to tell him what his distemper is (v. 15), *an evil spirit*, not by chance but *from God* and his providence, *troubleth thee.* Now, 1. The means they all advised him to for his relief was music (v. 16): "Let us have a *cunning player on the harp* to attend thee." How much better friends had they been to him if they had advised him, since the evil spirit was from the Lord, to give all diligence to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him and to intercede with God for him! then might he not only have had some present relief, but the good Spirit would have returned to him. But their project is to make him merry, and so cure him. Many whose consciences are convinced and startled are for ever ruined by such methods as these, which drown all care of the soul in the delights of sense. Yet Saul's servants did not amiss to send for music as a help to cheer up the spirits, if they had but withal sent for a prophet to give him good counsel. And (as bishop Hall observes) it was well they did not send for a witch or diviner, by his enchantments to cast out the evil spirit, which has been the abominably wicked practice of some that have worn the Christian name, who consult the devil in their distresses and make hell their refuge. It will be no less than a miracle of divine grace if those who thus agree with Satan ever break off from him again. 2. One of his servants recommended David to him, as a fit person to be employed in the use of these means, little imagining that he was the man whom Samuel meant when he told Saul of a neighbour of his, better than he, who should have the kingdom, *ch. xv. 28.* It is a very high character which this servant of Saul's here gives of David (v. 18), that he was not only fit for his purpose as a comely person and skilful

in playing, but a man of courage and conduct, a mighty valiant man, and prudent in all matters, fit to be further preferred, and (which crowned his character) *the Lord is with him*. By this it appears that though David, after he was anointed, returned to his country business, and there remained on his head no marks of the oil, so careful was he to keep that secret, yet the workings of the Spirit signified by the oil could not be hid, but made him shine in obscurity, so that all his neighbours observed with wonder the great improvements of his mind on a sudden. David, even in his shepherd's garb, has become an oracle, a champion, and every thing that is great. His fame reached the court soon, for Saul was inquisitive after such young men, *ch. xiv. 52*. When the Spirit of God comes upon a man he will make his face to shine. 3. David is hereupon sent for to court. And it seems, (1.) His father was very willing to part with him, sent him very readily, and a present with him to Saul, *v. 20*. The present was, according to the usage of those times, bread and wine (compare, *ch. x. 3, 4*), therefore acceptable because expressive of the homage and allegiance of him that sent it. Probably Jesse, who knew what his son David was designed for, was aware that Providence was herein fitting him for it, and therefore he would not force Providence by sending him to court uncalled, yet he followed Providence very cheerfully when he saw it plainly putting him into the way of preferment. Some suggest that when Jesse received that message, *Send me David thy son*, he began to be afraid that Saul had got some intimation of his being anointed, and sent for him to do him a mischief, and therefore Jesse sent a present to pacify him; but it is probable that the person, whoever he was, that brought the message, gave him an account on what design he was sent for. (2.) Saul became very kind to him (*v. 21*), *loved him greatly*, and designed to *make him his armour-bearer*, and (contrary to the manner of the king, *ch. viii. 11*) asked his father's leave to keep him in his service (*v. 22*): *Let David, I pray thee, stand before me*. And good reason he had to respect him, for he did him a great deal of service with his music, *v. 23*. Only his instrumental music with his harp is mentioned, but it should seem, by the account Josephus gives, that he added vocal music to it, and sung hymns, probably divine hymns, songs of praise, to his harp. David's music was Saul's physic. [1.] Music has a natural tendency to compose and exhilarate the mind, when it is disturbed and saddeneæ. Elisha used it for the calming of his spirits, 2 Kings iii. 15. On some it has a greater influence and effect than on others, and, probably, Saul was one of those. Not that it charmed the evil spirit, but it made his spirit sedate, and allayed those tumults of the animal spirits by which the devil had advantage against him. The beams of the sun (it is the learned

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Bochart's comparison) cannot be cut with a sword, quenched with water, or blown out with wind, but, by closing the window-shutters, they may be kept out of the chamber. Music cannot work upon the devil, but it may shut up the passages by which he has access to the mind. [2.] David's music was extraordinary, and in mercy to him, that he might gain a reputation at court, as one that had the Lord with him. God made his performances in music more successful, in this case, than those of others would have been. Saul found, even after he had conceived an enmity to David, that no one else could do him the same service (*ch. xix. 9, 10*), which was a great aggravation of his outrage against him. It is a pity that music, which may be so serviceable to the good temper of the mind, should ever be abused by any to the support of vanity and luxury, and made an occasion of drawing the heart away from God and serious things: if this be to any the effect of it, it drives away the good Spirit, not the evil spirit.

## CHAP. XVII.

David is the man whom God now delights to honour, for he is a man after his own heart. We read in the foregoing chapter how, after he was anointed, Providence made him famous in the court: we read in this chapter how Providence made him much more famous in the camp, and, by both, not only marked him for a great man, but fitted him for the throne for which he was designed. In the court he was only Saul's physician; but in the camp Israel's champion; there he fairly fought, and beat Goliath of Gath. In the story observe, I. What a noble figure Goliath made, and how durably he challenged the armies of Israel, *ver. 1-11*. II. What a mean figure David made, when Providence brought him to the army, *ver. 12-20*. III. The unparalleled bravery wherewith David undertook to encounter this Philistine, *ver. 31-32*. IV. The pious resolution with which he attacked him, *ver. 40-47*. V. The glorious victory he obtained over him with a sling and a stone, and the advantage which the Israelites thereby gained against the Philistines, *ver. 48-54*. VI. The great notice which was hereupon taken of David at court, *ver. 55-58*.

**N**OW the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which *belongeth* to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. 3 And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and *there was* a valley between them. 4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span. 5 And *he had* a helmet of brass upon his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail: and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of brass. 6 And *he had* greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. 7

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And the staff of his spear *was* like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head *weighed* six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. 8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set *your* battle in array? *am* not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. 9 If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. 10 And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. 11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

It was not long ago that the Philistines were soundly beaten, and put to the worse, before Israel, and they would have been totally routed if Saul's rashness had not prevented; but here we have them making head again. Observe,

I. How they defied Israel with their armies, v. 1. They made a descent upon the Israelites' country, and possessed themselves, as it should seem, of some part of it, for they encamped in a place *which belonged to Judah*. Israel's ground would never have been footing for Philistine-armies if Israel had been faithful to their God. The Philistines (it is probable) had heard that Samuel had fallen out with Saul and forsaken him, and no longer assisted and advised him, and that Saul had grown melancholy and unfit for business, and this news encouraged them to make this attempt for the retrieving of the credit they had lately lost. The enemies of the church are watchful to take all advantages, and they never have greater advantages than when her protectors have provoked God's Spirit and prophets to leave them. Saul mustered his forces, and faced them, v. 2, 3. And here we must take notice, 1. That the evil spirit, for the present, had left Saul, *ch. xvi. 23*. David's harp having given him some relief, perhaps the alarms and affairs of the war prevented the return of the distemper. Business is a good antidote against melancholy. Let the mind have something without to fasten on and employ itself about, and it will be the less in danger of preying upon itself. God, in mercy to Israel, suspended the judgment for a while; for how distracted must the affairs of the public have been if at this juncture the prince had been distracted! 2. That David for the present had returned to Beth-

lehem, and had left the court, v. 15. When Saul had no further occasion to use him for the relief of his distemper, though, being anointed, he had a very good private reason, and, having a grant of the place of Saul's armour-bearer, he had a very plausible pretence to have continued his attendance, as a retainer to the court, yet he went home to Bethlehem, and returned to keep his father's sheep; this was a rare instance, in a young man that stood so fair for preferment, of humility and affection to his parents. He knew better than most do how to come down again after he had begun to rise, and strangely preferred the retirements of a pastoral life before all the pleasures and gaieties of the court. None more fit for honour than he, nor that deserved it better, and yet none more dead to it.

II. How they defied Israel with their champion Goliath, whom they were almost as proud of as he was of himself, hoping by him to recover their reputation and dominion. Perhaps the army of the Israelites was superior in number and strength to that of the Philistines, which made the Philistines decline a battle, and stand at bay with them, desiring rather to put the issue upon a single combat, in which, having such a champion, they hoped to gain the victory. Now concerning this champion observe,

1. His prodigious size. He was of the sons of Anak, who at Gath kept their ground in Joshua's time (Josh. xi. 22), and kept up a race of giants there, of which Goliath was one, and, it is probable, one of the largest. He was in height *six cubits and a span, v. 4*. The learned bishop Cumberland has made it out that the scripture-cubit was above twenty-one inches (above three inches more than our half-yard) and a span was half a cubit, by which computation Goliath wanted but eight inches of four yards in height, eleven feet and four inches, a monstrous stature, and which made him very formidable, especially if he had strength and spirit proportionable.

2. His armour. Art, as well as nature, made him terrible. He was well furnished with defensive armour (v. 5, 6): *A helmet of brass on his head, a coat of mail, made of brass plates laid over one another, like the scales of a fish; and, because his legs would lie most within the reach of an ordinary man, he wore brass boots, and had a large corselet of brass about his neck.* The coat is said to weigh 5000 shekels, and a shekel was half an ounce avoirdupoise, a vast weight for a man to carry, all the other parts of his armour being proportionable. But some think it should be translated, not the *weight* of the coat, but the *value* of it, was 5000 shekels; so much it cost. His offensive weapons were extraordinary, of which his spear only is here described, v. 7. It was like a weaver's beam. His arm could manage that which an ordinary man could scarcely heave. His

shield only, which was the lightest of all his accoutrements, was carried before him by his esquire, probably for state; for he that was clad in brass little needed a shield.

3. His challenge. The Philistines having chosen him for their champion, to save themselves from the hazard of a battle, he here throws down the gauntlet, and bids defiance to the armies of Israel, v. 8—10. He came into the valley that lay between the camps, and, his voice probably being as much stronger than other people's as his arm was, he cried so as to make them all hear him, *Give me a man, that we may fight together.* He looked upon himself with admiration, because he was so much taller and stronger than all about him; his heart (says bishop Hall) nothing but a lump of proud flesh. He looked upon Israel with disdain, because they had none among them of such a monstrous bulk, and defies them to find a man among them bold enough to enter the list with him. (1.) He upbraids them with their folly in drawing an army together: "*Why have you come to set the battle in array? How dare you oppose the mighty Philistines?*" Or, "Why should the two armies engage, when the controversy may be sooner decided, with only the expense of one life and the hazard of another?" (2.) He offers to put the war entirely upon the issue of the duel he proposes: "If your champion kill me, we will be your servants; if I kill him, you shall be ours." This, says bishop Patrick, was only a bravado, for no nation would be willing thus to venture its all upon the success of one man, nor is it justifiable; notwithstanding Goliath's stipulation here, when he was killed the Philistines did not stand to his word, nor submit themselves as servants to Israel. When he boasts, *I am a Philistine, and you are servants to Saul*, he would have it thought a great piece of condescension in him, who was a chief ruler, to enter the lists with an Israelite; for he looked on them as no better than slaves. The Chaldee paraphrase brings him in boasting that he was the man that had killed Hophni and Phinehas and taken the ark prisoner, but that the Philistines had never given him so much as the command of a regiment in recompence of his services, whereas Saul had been made king for his services: "Let him therefore take up the challenge."

4. The terror this struck upon Israel: *Saul and all his army were greatly afraid*, v. 11. The people would not have been dismayed but that they observed Saul's courage failed him; and it is not to be expected that, if the leader be a coward, the followers should be bold. We found before, when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul (ch. xi. 6), none could be more daring nor forward to answer the challenge of Nahash the Ammonite, but now that the *Spirit of the Lord had departed from him* even the big looks and big words of a single Philistine make him

change colour. But where was Jonathan all this while? Why did not he accept the challenge, who, in the last war, had so bravely engaged a whole army of Philistines? Doubtless he did not feel himself stirred up of God to it, as he did in the former case. As the best, so the bravest men, are no more than what God makes them. Jonathan must now sit still, because the honour of engaging Goliath is reserved for David. In great and good actions, the wind of the Spirit blows when and where he listeth. Now the pious Israelites lament their king's breach with Samuel.

12 Now David *was* the son of that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah, whose name *was* Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men *for* an old man in the days of Saul. 13 And the three eldest sons of Jesse went *and* followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle *were* Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Sham-mah. 14 And David *was* the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. 15 But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem. 16 And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days. 17 And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched *corn*, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; 18 And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of *their* thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. 19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, *were* in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. 20 And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. 21 For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army. 22 And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren. 23 And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion,

the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them. 24 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid. 25 And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel. 26 And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? 27 And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him. 28 And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. 29 And David said, What have I now done? *Is there not a cause?* 30 And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner.

Forty days the two armies lay encamped facing one another, each advantageously posted, but neither forward to engage. Either they were parleying and treating of an accommodation or they were waiting for recruits; and perhaps there were frequent skirmishes between small detached parties. All this while, twice a day, morning and evening, did the insulting champion appear in the field and repeat his challenge, his own heart growing more and more proud for his not being answered and the people of Israel more and more timorous, while God designed hereby to ripen him for destruction and to make Israel's deliverance the more illustrious. All this while David is keeping his father's sheep, but at the end of forty days Providence brings him to the field to win

and wear the laurel which no other Israelite dares venture for. We have in these verses.

I. The present state of his family. His father was old (c. 12): *He went among men for an old man*, was taken notice of for his great age, above what was usual at that time, and therefore was excused from public services, and went not in person to the wars, but sent his sons; he had the honours paid him that were due to his age, his hoary head was a crown of glory to him. David's three elder brethren, who perhaps envied his place at the court, got their father to send for him home, and let them go to the camp, where they hoped to signalize themselves and eclipse him (r. 13, 14), while David himself was so far from being proud of the services he had done his prince, or ambitious of further preferment, that he not only returned from court to the obscurity of his father's house, but to the care, and toil, and (as it proved, v. 34) the peril, of *keeping his father's sheep*. It was the praise of this humility that it came after he had the honour of a courtier, and the reward of it that it came before the honour of a conqueror. *Before honour is humility*. Now he had that opportunity of meditation and prayer, and other acts of devotion, which fitted him for what he was destined to more than all the military exercises of that inglorious camp could do.

II. The orders his father gave him to go and visit his brethren in the camp. He did not himself ask leave to go, to satisfy his curiosity, or to gain experience and make observations; but his father sent him on a mean and homely errand, on which any of his servants might have gone. He must carry some bread and cheese to his brethren, ten loaves with some parched corn for themselves (v. 17) and ten cheeses (which, it seems, he thought too good for them) for a present to their colonel, v. 18. David must still be the drudge of the family, though he was to be the greatest ornament of it. He had not so much as an ass at command to carry his load, but must take it on his back, and yet run to the camp. Jesse, we thought, was privy to his being anointed, and yet industriously kept him thus mean and obscure, probably to hide him from the eye of suspicion and envy, knowing that he was anointed to a crown in reversion. He must observe how his brethren fared, whether they were not reduced to short allowance, now that the encampment continued so long, that, if need were, he might send them more provisions. And he must take their pledge, that is, if they had pawned any thing, he must redeem it: *take notice of their company*, so some observe, whom they associate with, and what sort of life they lead. Perhaps David, like Joseph, had formerly brought to his father their evil report, and now he sends him to enquire concerning their manners. See the care of pious parents about their

children when they are abroad from them, especially in places of temptation; they are solicitous how they conduct themselves, and particularly what company they keep. Let children think of this, and conduct themselves accordingly, remembering that, when they are from under their parents' eye, they are still under God's eye.

III. David's dutiful obedience to his father's command. His prudence and care made him he up early (v. 20), and yet not to leave his sheep without a keeper, so faithful was he in a few things and therefore the fitter to be made ruler over many things, and so well had he learnt to obey before he pretended to command. God's providence brought him to the camp very seasonably, when both sides had set the battle in array, and, as it should seem, were more likely to come to an engagement than they had yet been during all the forty days, v. 21. Both sides were now preparing to fight. Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army just at that critical juncture, but the wise God orders the time and all the circumstances of actions and affairs so as to serve his designs of securing the interests of Israel and advancing the men after his own heart. Now observe here,

1. How brisk and lively David was, v. 22. What articles he brought he honestly took care of, and left them with those that had the charge of the bag and baggage; but, though he had come a long journey with a great load, he *ran into the army*, to see what was doing there, and to pay his respects to his brethren. *Seest thou a man thus diligent in his business*, he is in the way of preferment, *he shall stand before kings*.

2. How bold and daring the Philistine was, v. 23. Now that the armies were drawn out into a line of battle he appeared first to renew his challenge, vainly imagining that he was in the eager chase of his own glory and triumph, whereas really he was but courting his own destruction.

3. How timorous and faint-hearted the men of Israel were. Though they had, for forty days together, been used to his haughty looks and threatening language, and, having seen no execution done by either, might have learned to despise both, yet, upon his approach, they *fled from him and were greatly afraid*, v. 24. One Philistine could never thus have chased 1000 Israelites, and put 10,000 to flight, unless their Rock, being treacherously forsaken by them, had justly *sold them, and shut them up*, Deut. xxxii. 30.

4. How high Saul bid for a champion. Though he was the tallest of all the men of Israel, and, if he had not been so, while he kept close to God might himself have safely taken up the gauntlet which this insolent Philistine threw down, yet, the Spirit of the Lord having departed from him, he durst not do it, nor press Jonathan to do it; but whoever will do it shall have as good prefer-

ment as he can give him, v. 25. If the hope of wealth and honour will prevail with any man to expose himself so far, it is proclaimed that the bold adventurer, if he come off, shall marry the king's daughter and have a good portion with her; but, as it should seem, whether he come off or no, his *father's house shall be free in Israel*, from all toll, tribute, custom, and services to the crown, or shall be ennobled and advanced to the peerage.

5. How much concerned David was to assert the honour of God and Israel against the impudent challenges of this champion. He asked what reward was promised to him that should slay this Philistine (v. 26), though he knew already, not because he was ambitious of the honour, but because he would have it taken notice of, and reported to Saul, how much he resented the indignity hereby done to Israel and Israel's God. He might have presumed so far upon his acquaintance and interest at court as to go himself to Saul to offer his service; but his modesty would not let him do this. It was one of his own rules, before it was one of his son's proverbs, *Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men* (Prov. xxv. 6); yet his zeal put him upon that method which he hoped would bring him into this great engagement. Two considerations, it seems, fired David with a holy indignation:—(1.) That the challenger was one that was uncircumcised, a stranger to God and out of covenant with him. (2.) That the challenged were the armies of the living God, devoted to him, employed by him and for him, so that the affronts offered to them reflected upon the living God himself, and *that* he could not bear. When therefore some had told him what was the reward proposed for killing the Philistine (v. 27) he asked others (v. 30), with the same resentment, which he expected would at length come to Saul's ear.

6. How he was brow-beaten and discouraged by his eldest brother Eliab, who, taking notice of his forwardness, fell into a passion upon it, and gave David very abusive language, v. 28. Consider this, (1.) As the fruit of Eliab's jealousy. He was the eldest brother, and David the youngest, and perhaps it had been customary with him (as it is with too many elder brothers) to trample upon him and take every occasion to chide him. But those who thus exalt themselves over their juniors may perhaps live to see themselves, by a righteous providence, abased and those to whom they are abusive exalted. Time may come when the elder may serve the younger. But Eliab was now vexed that his younger brother should speak those bold words against the Philistine which he himself durst not say. He knew what honour David had already had in the court, and, if he should now get honour in the camp (from which he thought he had found

means effectually to seclude him, v. 15), the glory of his elder brethren would be eclipsed and stained; and therefore (such is the nature of jealousy) he would rather that Goliath should triumph over Israel than that David should be the man that should triumph over him. *Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who can stand before envy,* especially the envy of a brother, the keenness of which Jacob, and Joseph, and David experienced? See Prov. xviii. 19. It is very ill-favoured language that Eliab here gives him; not only unjust and unkind, but, at this time, basely ungrateful; for David was now sent by his father, as Joseph by his, on a kind visit to his brethren. Eliab intended, in what he said, not only to grieve and discourage David himself, and quench that noble fire which he perceived glowing in his breast, but to represent him to those about him as an idle proud lad, not fit to be taken notice of. He gives them to understand that his business was only to keep sheep, and falsely insinuates that he was a careless unfaithful shepherd; though he had left his charge in good hands (v. 20), yet he must tauntingly be asked, *With whom hast thou left those few sheep?* Though he came down now to the camp in obedience to his father and kindness to his brethren, and Eliab knew this, yet his coming is turned to his reproach: "Thou hast come down, not to do any service, but to gratify thy own curiosity, and only to look about thee;" and thence he will infer *the pride and naughtiness of his heart*, and pretends to know it as certainly as if he were in his bosom. David could appeal to God concerning his humility and sincerity (Ps. xvii. 3; cxxxi. 1) and at this time gave proofs of both, and yet could not escape this hard character from his own brother. See the folly, absurdity, and wickedness, of a proud and envious passion; how groundless its jealousies are, how unjust its censures, how unfair its representations, how bitter its invectives, and how indecent its language. God, by his grace, keep us from such a spirit! (2.) As a trial of David's meekness, patience, and constancy. A short trial it was, and he approved himself well in it; for, [1.] He bore the provocation with admirable temper (v. 29): "*What have I now done?* What fault have I committed, for which I should thus be chidden? *Is there not a cause* for my coming to the camp, when my father sent me? *Is there not a cause* for my resenting the injury done to Israel's honour by Goliath's challenges?" He had right and reason on his side, and knew it, and therefore did not render railing for railing, but with a soft answer turned away his brother's wrath. This conquest of his own passion was in some respects more honourable than his conquest of Goliath. *He that hath rule over his own spirit is better than the mighty.* It was no time for David to quarrel with his brother when the Philistines were

upon them. The more threatening the church's enemies are the more forbearing her friends should be with one another. [2.] He broke through the discouragement with admirable resolution. He would not be driven off from his thoughts of engaging the Philistine by the ill-will of his brother. Those that undertake great and public services must not think it strange if they be discountenanced and opposed by those from whom they had reason to expect support and assistance; but must humbly go on with their work, in the face not only of their enemies' threats, but of their friends' slights and suspicions.

31 And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed *them* before Saul: and he sent for him. 32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. 33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou *art but* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. 34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: 35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. 36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. 37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. 38 And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. 39 And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved *it*. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved *them*. And David put them off him.

David is at length presented to Saul for his champion (v. 31) and he bravely undertakes to fight the Philistine (v. 32): *Let no*



man's heart fail because of him. It would have reflected too much upon the valour of his prince if he had said, *Let not thy heart fail*; therefore he speaks generally: *Let no man's heart fail*. A little shepherd, come but this morning from keeping sheep, has more courage than all the mighty men of Israel, and encourages them. Thus does God often send good words to his Israel, and do great things for them, by the weak and foolish things of the world. David only desires a commission from Saul to go and fight with the Philistine, but says nothing to him of the reward he had proposed, because that was not the thing he was ambitious of, but only the honour of serving God and his country: nor would he seem to question Saul's generosity. Two things David had to do with Saul:—

I. To get clear of the objection Saul made against his undertaking. "Alas!" says Saul, "thou hast a good heart to it, but art by no means an equal match for this Philistine. To engage with him is to throw away a life which may better be reserved for more agreeable services. *Thou art but a youth*, rash and inconsiderate, weak and unversed in arms: he is a man that has the head and hands of a man, *a man of war*, trained up and inured to it *from his youth* (v. 33), and how canst thou expect but that he will be too hard for thee?" David, as he had answered his brother's passion with meekness, so he answered Saul's fear with faith, and gives a reason of the hope which was in him that he should conquer the Philistine, to the satisfaction of Saul. We have reason to fear that Saul had no great acquaintance with nor regard to the word of God, and therefore David, in reasoning with him, fetched not his arguments and encouragements thence, how much soever he had an eye to it in his own mind. But he argues from experience; though he was but a youth, and never in the wars, yet perhaps he had done as much as the killing of Goliath came to, for he had had, by divine assistance, spirit enough to encounter and strength enough to subdue a lion once and another time a bear that robbed him of his lambs, v. 34—36. To these he compares this uncircumcised Philistine, looks upon him to be as much a ravenous beast as either of them, and therefore doubts not but to deal as easily with him; and hereby he gives Saul to understand that he was not so inexperienced in hazardous combats as he took him to be.

1. He tells his story like a man of spirit. He is not ashamed to own that he kept his father's sheep, which his brother had just now upbraided him with. So far is he from concealing it that from his employment as a shepherd he fetches the experience that now animated him. But he lets those about him know that he was no ordinary shepherd. Whatever our profession or calling is, he it ever so mean, we should labour to excel in it,

and do the business of it in the best manner. When David kept sheep, (1.) He approved himself very careful and tender of his flock, though it was not his own, but his father's. He could not see a lamb in distress but he would venture his life to rescue it. This temper made him fit to be a king, to whom the lives of subjects should be dear and their blood precious (Ps. lxxii. 14), and fit to be a type of Christ, the good Shepherd, who *gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom* (Isa. xl. 11), and who not only ventured, but *laid down his life for his sheep*. Thus too was David fit to be an example to ministers with the utmost care and diligence to watch for souls, that they be not a prey to the roaring lion. (2.) He approved himself very bold and brave in the defence of his flock. This was that which he was now concerned to give proof of, and better evidence could not be demanded than this: "Thy servant not only rescued the lambs, but, to revenge the injury, *slew both the lion and the bear*."

2. He applies his story like a man of faith. He owns (v. 37) it was *the Lord that delivered him from the lion and the bear*; to him he gives the praise of that great achievement, and thence he infers, *He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine*. "The lion and the bear were enemies only to me and my sheep, and it was in defence of my own interest that I attacked them; but this Philistine is an enemy to God and Israel, *defies the armies of the living God*, and it is for their honour that I attack him." Note, (1.) Our experiences ought to be improved by us as our encouragements to trust in God and venture in the way of duty. He that has delivered does and will. (2.) By the care which common Providence takes of the inferior creatures, and the protection they are under, we may be encouraged to depend upon that special Providence which surrounds the Israel of God. He that sets bounds to the waves of the sea and the rage of wild beasts can and will restrain the wrath of wicked men. Paul seems to allude to this of David (2 Tim. iv. 17, 18), *I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*, and therefore, I trust, *the Lord shall deliver me*. And perhaps David here thought of the story of Samson, and encouraged himself with it; for his slaying a lion was a happy presage of his many illustrious victories over the Philistines in single combat. Thus David took off Saul's objection against his undertaking, and gained a commission to fight the Philistine, with which Saul gave him a hearty good wish; since he would not venture himself, he prayed for him that would: *Go, and the Lord be with thee*, a good word, if it was not spoken customarily, and in a formal manner, as too often it is. But David has somewhat to do likewise,

II. To get clear of the armour wherewith Saul would, by all means, have him dressed

up when he went upon this great action (v. 33): He armed David with his armour, not that which he wore himself, the disproportion of his stature would not admit that, but some that he kept in his armoury, little thinking that he on whom he now put his helmet and coat of mail must shortly inherit his crown and robe. David, being not yet resolved which way to attack his enemy, girded on his sword, not knowing, as yet, but he should have occasion to make use of it; but he found the armour would but encumber him, and would be rather his burden than his defence, and therefore he desires leave of Saul to put them off again: *I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them*, that is, "I have never been accustomed to such accoutrements as these." We may suppose Saul's armour was both very fine and very firm, but what good would it do David if it were not fit, or if he knew not how to manage himself in it? Those that aim at things above their education and usage, and covet the attire and armour of princes, forget that that is the best for us which we are fit for and accustomed to; if we had our desire, we should wish to be in our own coat again, and should say, "We cannot go with these;" we had therefore better go without them.

40 And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. 41 And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. 42 And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. 43 And the Philistine said unto David, *Am I a dog*, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. 45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. 46 This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give

the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47 And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.

We are now coming near this famous combat, and have in these verses the preparations and remonstrances made on both sides.

I. The preparations made on both sides for the encounter. The Philistine was already fixed, as he had been daily for the last forty days. Well might he go with his armour, for he had sufficiently proved it. Only we are told (v. 41) that he *came on and drew near*, a signal, it is likely, being given that his challenge was accepted, and, as if he distrusted his helmet and coat of mail, a man went before him, *carrying his shield*, for his own hands were full with his sword and spear, v. 45. But what arms and ammunition is David furnished with? Truly none but what he brought with him as a shepherd; no breastplate, nor corselet, but his plain shepherd's coat; no spear, but his staff; no sword nor bow, but his sling; no quiver, but his scrip; nor any arrows, but, instead of them, five smooth stones picked up out of the brook, v. 40. By this it appeared that his confidence was purely in the power of God, and not in any sufficiency of his own, and that now at length he who put it into his heart to fight the Philistine put it into his head with what weapons to do it.

II. The conference which precedes the encounter, in which observe,

1. How very proud Goliath was, (1.) With what scorn he looked upon his adversary, v. 42. He looked about, expecting to meet some tall strong man, but, when he saw what a mean figure he made with whom he was to engage, he disdained him, thought it below him to enter the lists with him, fearing that the contemptibleness of the champion he contended with would lessen the glory of his victory. He took notice of his person, that he was but a youth, not come to his strength, *ruddy and of a fair countenance*, fitter to accompany the virgins of Israel in their dances (if mixed dancing was then in use) than to lead on the men of Israel in their battles. He took notice of his array with great indignation (v. 43): "*Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? Dost thou think to beat me as easily as thou dost thy shepherd's dog?*" (2.) With what confidence he presumed upon his success. He cursed David by his gods, imprecating the impotent vengeance of his idols against him, thinking these fire-balls thrown about him

would secure his success: and therefore, in confidence of that, he darts his grimaces, as if threatening words would kill (v. 44): "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air, it will be a tender and delicate feast for them." Thus the security and presumption of fools destroy them.

2. How very pious David was. His speech savours nothing of ostentation, but God is all in all in it, v. 45—47. (1.) He derives his authority from God: "I come to thee by warrant and commission from heaven, in the name of the Lord, who has called me to and anointed me for this undertaking, who, by his universal providence, is the Lord of hosts, of all hosts, and therefore has power to do what he pleases, and, by the special grace of his covenant, is the God of the armies of Israel, and therefore has engaged and will employ his power for their protection, and against thee who hast impiously defied them." The name of God David relied on, as Goliath did on his sword and spear. See Ps. xx. 7; cxviii. 10, 11. (2.) He depends for success upon God, v. 46. David speaks with as much assurance as Goliath had done, but upon better ground; it is his faith that says, "This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand, and not only thy carcase, but the carcases of the host of the Philistines, shall be given to the birds and beasts of prey." (3.) He devotes the praise and glory of all to God. He did not, like Goliath, seek his own honour, but the honour of God, not doubting but by the success of this action, [1.] All the world should be made to know that there is a God, and that the God of Israel is the one only living and true God, and all other pretended deities are vanity and a lie. [2.] All Israel (whom he calls not this' army, but *this assembly*, or church, because they were now religiously attending the goings of their God and King, as they used to do in the sanctuary) shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear (v. 47), but can, when he pleases, save without either and against both, Ps. xli. 9. David addresses himself to this combat rather as a priest that was going to offer a sacrifice to the justice of God than as a soldier that was going to engage an enemy of his country.

48 And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49 And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. 50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and

with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but *there was* no sword in the hand of David. 51 Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. 52 And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron. 53 And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents. 54 And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent. 55 And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son *is* this youth? And Abner said, *As* thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. 56 And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling *is*. 57 And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, Whose son *art* thou, *thou* young man? And David answered, *I am* the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.

Here is, 1. The engagement between the two champions, v. 48. To this engagement the Philistine advanced with a great deal of state and gravity; if he must encounter a pigmy, yet it shall be with the magnificence of a giant and a grandee. This is intimated in the manner of expression: *He arose, and came, and drew nigh*, like a stalking mountain, overlaid with brass and iron, *to meet David*. David advanced with no less activity and cheerfulness, as one that aimed more to do execution than to make a figure: *He hasted, and ran*, being lightly clad, *to meet the Philistine*. We may imagine with what tenderness and compassion the Israelites saw such a pleasing youth as this throwing himself into the mouth of destruction, but he knew whom he had believed and for whom he acted. 2. The fall of Goliath in this engagement. He was in no haste, be-

cause in no fear, but confident that he should soon at one stroke cleave his adversary's head; but, while he was preparing to do it solemnly, David did his business effectually, without any parade: he slang a stone which hit him in the forehead, and, in the twinkling of an eye, fetched him to the ground, *v.* 49. Goliath knew there were famous sliogers in Israel (*Judg.* xx. 16), yet was either so forgetful or presumptuous as to go with the beaver of his helmet open, and thither, to the only part left exposed, not so much David's art as God's providence directed the stone, and brought it with such force that it sunk into his head, notwithstanding the impudence with which his forehead was brazened. See how frail and uncertain life is, even when it thinks itself best fortified, and how quickly, how easily, and with how small a matter, the passage may be opened for life to go out and death to enter. Goliath himself *has not power over the spirit to retain the spirit*, *Ecc.* viii. 8. Let not the strong man glory in his strength, nor the armed man in his armour. See how God resists the proud and pours contempt upon those that bid defiance to him and his people. None ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. One of the Rabbin thinks that when Goliath said to David, *Come, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air*, he threw up his head so hastily that his helmet fell off, and so left his broad forehead a fair mark for David. To complete the execution, David drew Goliath's own sword, a two-handed weapon for David, and with it *cut off his head*, *v.* 51. What need had David to take a sword of his own? his enemy's sword shall serve his purpose, when he has occasion for one. God is greatly glorified when his proud enemies are cut off with their own sword and he makes *their own tongues to fall upon them*, *P.* lxiv. 8. David's victory over Goliath was typical of the triumphs of the son of David over Satan and all the powers of darkness, whom he *spoiled, and made a show of them openly* (*Col.* ii. 15), and we through him are *more than conquerors*. 3. The defeat of the Philistines' army hereupon. They relied wholly upon the strength of their champion, and therefore, when they saw him slain, they did not, as Goliath had offered, throw down their arms and surrender themselves servants to Israel (*v.* 9), but took to their heels, being wholly dispirited, and thinking it to no purpose to oppose one before whom such a mighty man had fallen: *They fled* (*v.* 51), and this put life into the Israelites, who *shouted and pursued them* (David, it is probable, leading them on in the pursuit) even to the gates of their own cities, *v.* 52. In their return from the chase they seized all the baggage, plundered the tents (*v.* 53), and enriched themselves with the spoil. 4. David's disposal of his trophies, *v.* 54. He brought the head of the Philistine to Jerusalem, to be a terror to the

Jebusites, who held the strong-hold of Zion: it is probable that he carried it in triumph to other cities. *His armour he laid up in his tent*; only the sword was preserved behind the ephod in the tabernacle, as consecrated to God, and a memorial of the victory to his honour, *ch.* xxi. 9. 5. The notice that was taken of David. Though he had been at court formerly, yet, having been for some time absent (*v.* 15), Saul had forgotten him, being melancholy and mindless, and little thinking that his musician would have spirit enough to be his champion; and therefore, as if he had never seen him before, he asked whose son he was. Abner was a stranger to him, but brought him to Saul (*v.* 57), and he gave a modest account of himself, *v.* 58. And now he was introduced to the court with much greater advantages than before, in which he owned God's hand performing all things for him.

## CHAP. XVIII.

In the course of the foregoing chapter we left David in triumph; now in this chapter we have, 1. The improvement of his triumph; he soon became, 1. Saul's constant attendant, *ver.* 2. 2. Jonathan's covenant friend, *ver.* 1, 3, 4. 3. The darling of his country, *ver.* 5, 7, 16. 11. The ally of his triumph. This is the vanity that accompanies even a right work, that "for a man is envied," *Ecc.* iv. 4. So David was by Saul. 1. He hated him, and sought to kill him himself, *ver.* 8-11. 2. He feared him, and contrived how he might have some mischief done him, *ver.* 12-17. He proposed to marry his daughter to him; but, [1.] Cheated him of the eldest to provoke him (*ver.* 19), and, [2.] Gave him the younger, upon conditions which would endanger his life, *ver.* 20-25. But David performed his conditions bravely (*ver.* 26, 27), and grew to be more and more esteemed, *ver.* 28-30. Still David is rising, but (as all that aim at the crown of life must expect) he had a great deal of difficulty and opposition to grapple with.

AND it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. 5 And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

David was anointed to the crown to take it out of Saul's hand, and over Jonathan's head, and yet here we find,

1. That Saul, who was now in possession of the crown, reposed a confidence in him, God so ordering it, that he might by his preferment at court be prepared for future service. Saul now took David home with him, and would not suffer him to return again

to his retirement, v. 2. And David having signalized himself above the men of war, in taking up the challenge which they declined, *Saul set him over the men of war* (v. 5), not that he made him general (Abner was in that post), but perhaps captain of the life-guard; or, though he was youngest, he ordered him to have the precedency, in recompence of his great services. He employed him in the affairs of government; and *David went out whithersoever Saul sent him*, showing himself as dutiful as he was bold and courageous. Those that hope to rule must first learn to obey. He had approved himself a dutiful son to Jesse his father, and now a dutiful servant to Saul his master; those that are good in one relation it is to be hoped will be so in another.

II. That Jonathan, who was heir to the crown, entered into covenant with him, God so ordering it, that David's way might be the clearer when his rival was his friend. 1. Jonathan conceived an extraordinary kindness and affection for him (v. 1): *When he had made an end of speaking to Saul* he fell perfectly in love with him. Whether it refers to his conference with Saul before the battle (*ch. xvii. 34, 37*), or to that after (v. 51), in which it is probable much more was said than is there set down, is uncertain. But, in both, David expressed himself with so much prudence, modesty, and piety, such a felicity of expression, with so much boldness and yet so much sweetness, and all this so natural and unaffected, and the more surprising because of the disadvantages of his education and appearance, *that the soul of Jonathan was immediately knit unto the soul of David*. Jonathan had formerly set upon a Philistine army with the same faith and bravery with which David had now attacked a Philistine giant; so that there was between them a very near resemblance of affections, dispositions, and counsels, which made their spirits unite so easily, so quickly, so closely, that they seemed but as one soul in two bodies. None had so much reason to dislike David as Jonathan had, because he was to put him by the crown, yet none regards him more. Those that are governed in their love by principles of wisdom and grace will not suffer their affections to be alienated by any secular regards or considerations: the greater thoughts will swallow up and overrule the less. 2. He testified his love to David by a generous present he made him, v. 4. He was uneasy at seeing so great a soul, though lodged in so fair a body, yet disguised in the mean and despicable dress of a poor shepherd, and therefore takes care to put him speedily into the habit of a courtier (for he gave him a robe) and of a soldier, for he gave him, instead of his staff and sling, a sword and bow, and, instead of his shepherd's scrip, a girdle, either a belt or a sash; and, which made the present much more obliging, they were the same that he himself

had worn, and (as a presage of what would follow) he stripped himself of them to dress David in them. Saul's would not fit him, but Jonathan's did. Their bodies were of a size, a circumstance which well agreed with the suitableness of their minds. When Saul put these marks of honour on David he put them off again, because he would first earn them and then wear them; but, now that he had given proofs of the spirit of a prince and a soldier, he was not ashamed to wear the habits of a prince and a soldier. David is seen in Jonathan's clothes, that all may take notice he is a Jonathan's second self. Our Lord Jesus has thus shown his love to us, that he stripped himself to clothe us, emptied himself to enrich us; nay, he did more than Jonathan, he clothed himself with our rags, whereas Jonathan did not put on David's. 3. He endeavoured to perpetuate this friendship. So entirely satisfied were they in each other, even at the first interview, that they made a covenant with each other, v. 3. Their mutual affection was sincere; and he that bears an honest mind startles not at assurances. True love desires to be constant. Those who love Christ as their own souls will be willing to join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant.

III. That both court and country agree to bless him. It is but seldom that they agree in their favourites; yet David was *accepted in the sight of all the people, and also* (which was strange) *in the sight of Saul's servants*, v. 5. The former cordially loved him, the latter could not for shame but caress and compliment him. And it was certainly a great instance of the power of God's grace in David that he was able to bear all this respect and honour flowing in upon him on a sudden without being lifted up above measure. Those that climb so fast have need of good heads and good hearts. It is more difficult to know how to abound than how to be abased.

6 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. 7 And the women answered *one another* as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8 And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed *but* thousands: and *what* can he have more but the kingdom? 9 And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10 And it

came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and *there was* a javelin in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall *with it*. And David avoided out of his presence twice.

Now begin David's troubles, and they not only tread on the heels of his triumphs, but take rise from them, such is the vanity of that in this world which seems greatest.

I. He was too much magnified by the common people. Some time after the victory Saul went a triumphant progress through the cities of Israel that lay next him, to receive the congratulations of the country. And, when he made his public entry into any place, the women were most forward to show him respect, as was usual then in public triumphs (v. 6), and they had got a song, it seems, which they sang in their dances (made by some poet or other, that was a great admirer of David's bravery, and was more just than wise, in giving his achievements in the late action the preference before Saul's), the burden of which was, *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*. Such a difference as this Moses made between the numbers of Ephraim and Manasseh, Deut. xxxiii. 17.

II. This mightily displeased Saul, and made him envy David, v. 8, 9. He ought to have considered that they referred only to this late action, and intended not to diminish any of Saul's former exploits; and that in the action now celebrated it was undeniably true that David, in killing Goliath, did in effect slay all the Philistines that were slain that day and defeated the whole army; so that they did but give David his due. It may be, he that composed the song only used a poetical liberty, and intended not any invidious comparison between Saul and David; or, if he did, it was below the great mind of a prince to take notice of such a reflection upon his personal honour, when it appeared that the glory of the public was sincerely intended. But Saul was very wroth, and presently suspected some treasonable design at the bottom of it: *What can he have more but the kingdom?* This made him eye David as one he was jealous of and sought advantages against (v. 9): his countenance was not towards him as it had been. Proud men cannot endure to hear any praised but themselves, and think all the honour lost that goes by themselves. It is a sign that the Spirit of God has departed from men if they be peevish in their resentment of affronts, envious and suspicious of all about them, and ill-natured in their con-

duct; for the wisdom from above makes us quite otherwise.

III. In his fury he aimed to kill David, v. 10, 11. *Jealousy is the rage of a man*; it made Saul outrageous against David and impatient to get him out of the way. 1. His fits of frenzy returned upon him. The very next day after he conceived malice against David the evil spirit from God, that had formerly haunted him, seized him again. Those that indulge themselves in envy and uncharitableness *give place to the devil*, and prepare for the re-entry of the unclean spirit, with seven others more wicked. Where envy is there is confusion. Saul pretended a religious ecstasy: *He prophesied in the midst of the house*, that is, he had the gestures and motions of a prophet, and humoured the thing well enough to decoy David into a snare, and that he might be fearless of any danger and off his guard; and perhaps designing, if he could but kill him, to impute it to a divine impulse and to charge it upon the spirit of prophecy with which he seemed to be animated: but really it was a hellish fury that actuated him. 2. David, though advanced to a much higher post of honour, disdained not, for his master's service, to return to his harp: *He played with his hand as at other times*. Let not the highest think any thing below them whereby they may do good and be serviceable to those they are obliged to. 3. He took this opportunity to aim at the death of David. A sword in a madman's hand is a dangerous thing, especially such a madman as Saul was, that was mad with malice. Yet he had a javelin or dart in his hand, which he projected, endeavouring thereby to slay David, not in a sudden passion, but deliberately: *I will smite David to the wall with it*, with such a desperate force did he throw it. Justly does David complain of his enemies that they hated him with a *cruel hatred*, Ps. xxv. 19. No life is thought too precious to be sacrificed to malice. If a grateful sense of the great service David had done to the public could not assuage Saul's fury, yet one would think he should have allowed himself to consider the kindness David was now doing him, in relieving him, as no one else could, against the worst of troubles. Those are possessed with a devilish spirit indeed that render evil for good. Compare David, with his harp in his hand, aiming to serve Saul, and Saul, with his javelin in his hand, aiming to slay David; and observe the meekness and usefulness of God's persecuted people and the brutishness and barbarity of their persecutors. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul*, Prov. xxix. 10. 4. David happily avoided the blow twice (namely, now, and afterwards, ch. xix. 10); he did not throw the javelin at Saul again, but withdrew, not fighting but flying for his own preservation; though he had both strength and

courage enough, and colour of right, to make resistance and revenge the injury, yet he did no more than secure himself, by getting out of the way of it. David, no doubt, had a watchful eye upon Saul's hand, and the javelin in it, and did as bravely in running from it as he did lately in running upon Goliath. Yet his safety must be ascribed to the watchful eye of God's providence upon him, saving his servant from the hurtful sword; and by this narrow escape it seemed he was designed for something extraordinary.

12 And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul. 13 Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14 And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD *was* with him. 15 Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them. 17 And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD's battles. For Saul said, Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him. 18 And David said unto Saul, Who *am* I? and what *is* my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king? 19 But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. 20 And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 21 And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in *the one of* the twain. 22 And Saul commanded his servants, *saying*, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son in law. 23 And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And

David said, Seemeth it to you *a* light *thing* to be a king's son in law, seeing that I *am* a poor man, and lightly esteemed? 24 And the servants of Saul told him, saying, On this manner spake David. 25 And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired. 27 Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife. 28 And Saul saw and knew that the LORD *was* with David, and *that* Michal Saul's daughter loved him. 29 And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually. 30 Then the princes of the Philistines went forth: and it came to pass, after they went forth, *that* David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by.

Saul had now, in effect, proclaimed war with David. He began in open hostility when he threw the javelin at him. Now we are here told how his enmity proceeded, and how David received the attacks of it.

I. See how Saul expressed his malice against David. 1. He was *afraid of him*, v. 12. Perhaps he pretended to be afraid that David would do him mischief, to force his way to the crown. Those that design ill against others are commonly willing to have it thought that others design ill against them. But David's withdrawing (v. 11) was a plain evidence that he was far from such a thought. However, he really stood in awe of him, as Herod feared John, Mark vi. 20. Saul was sensible that he had lost the favourable presence of God himself, and that David had it, and for this reason he feared him. *Note*, Those are truly great and to be revered that have God with them. The more *wisely David behaved himself* the more *Saul feared him*, v. 15, and again v. 29. Men think the way to be feared is to hector and threaten, which makes them feared by fools only, but de-

spised by the wise and good; whereas the way to be both feared and loved, feared by those to whom we would wish to be a terror and loved by those to whom we would wish to be a delight, is to *behave ourselves wisely*. Wisdom makes the face to shine and commands respect. 2. He removed him from court, and gave him a regiment in the country, v. 13. He made him captain over 1000, that he might be from under his eye, because he hated the sight of him; and that he might not secure the interest of the courtiers. Yet herein he did impolitely; for it gave David an opportunity of ingratiating himself with the people, who therefore *loved him* (v. 16) because he *went out and came in before them*, that is, he presided in the business of his country, civil as well as military, and gave universal satisfaction. 3. He stirred him up to take all occasions of quarrelling with the Philistines and engaging them (v. 17), insinuating to him that hereby he would do good service to his prince (*be thou valiant for me*), and good service to his God (*fight the Lord's battles*), and a kindness to himself too, for hereby he would qualify himself for the honour he designed him, which was to marry his eldest daughter to him. This he had merited by killing Goliath, for it was promised by proclamation to him that should do that exploit (ch. xvii. 25); but David was so modest as not to demand it, and now, when Saul proposed it, it was with design of mischief to him, to make him venture upon hazardous attempts, saying in his heart, *Let the hand of the Philistines be upon him*, hoping they would some time or other be the death of him; yet how could he expect this when he saw that God was with him? 4. He did what he could to provoke him to discontent and mutiny, by breaking his promise with him, and giving his daughter to another when the time came that she should have been given to him, v. 19. This was as great an affront as he could possibly put upon him, and touched him both in his honour and in his love. He therefore thought David's resentment of it would break out in some indecency or other, in word or deed, which might give him an advantage against him to take him off by the course of law. Thus evil men seek mischief. 5. When he was disappointed in this, he proffered him his other daughter (who it seems had a secret kindness for David, v. 20), but with this design, that she might be a *snare to him*, v. 21. (1.) Perhaps he hoped that she would, even after her marriage to David, take part with her father against her husband, and give him an opportunity of doing David an unkindness. However, (2.) The conditions of the marriage, he hoped, would be his destruction: for (so zealous will Saul seem against the Philistines) the conditions of the marriage must be that he killed 100 Philistines, and, as proofs that those he had slain were uncircumcised, he must bring in their fore-

skins cut off; this would be a just reproach upon the Philistines, who hated circumcision as it was an ordinance of God; and perhaps David, in doing this, would the more exasperate them against him, and make them seek to be revenged on him, which was the thing that Saul desired and designed, much more than to be avenged on the Philistines: *For Saul thought to make David fall by the Philistines*, v. 25. See here, [1.] What cheats bad men put upon themselves. Saul's conscience would not suffer him, except when the evil spirit was actually upon him, to aim at David's life himself, for even he could not but conceive a horror at the thought of murdering such an innocent and excellent person; but he thought that to expose him designedly to the Philistines had nothing bad in it (*Let not my hand be upon him, but the hand of the Philistines*), whereas that malicious design against him was as truly murder before God as if he had slain him with his own hands. [2.] What cheats they put upon the world. Saul pretended extraordinary kindness for David even when he aimed at his ruin, and was actually plotting it: *Thou shalt be my son-in-law*, says he (v. 21), notwithstanding he hated him implacably. Perhaps David refers to this when (Ps. lv. 21) he speaks of his enemy as one whose words were *smoother than butter, but war was in his heart*. It is probable that Saul's employing his servants to persuade David to enter into a treaty of a match with his daughter Michal (v. 22) arose from an apprehension that either his having cheated him about his elder daughter (v. 19) or the hardness of the terms he intended now to propose would make him decline it.

11. See how David conducted himself when the tide of Saul's displeasure ran thus high against him.

1. *He behaved himself wisely in all his ways*. He perceived Saul's jealousy of him, which made him very cautious and circumspect in every thing he said and did, and careful to give no offence. He did not complain of hard measure nor make himself the head of a party, but managed all the affairs he was entrusted with as one that made it his business to do real service to his king and country, looking upon that to be the end of his preferment. And then *the Lord was with him* to give him success in all his undertakings. Though he procured Saul's ill-will by it, yet he obtained God's favour. Compare this with Ps. ci. 2, where it is David's promise, *I will behave myself wisely*; and that promise he here performed; and it is his prayer, *O, when wilt thou come unto me?* And that prayer God here answered: *The Lord was with him*. However blind fortune may seem to favour fools, God will own and bless those that behave themselves wisely.

2. When it was proposed to him to be son-in-law to the king he once and again received the proposal with all possible modesty



and humility. When Saul proposed his elder daughter to him (v. 18) he said, *Who am I, and what is my life?* When the courtiers proposed the younger, he took no notice of the affront Saul had put upon him in disposing of the elder from him, but continued in the same mind (v. 23): *Seemeth it a light thing to you to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?* He knew Michal loved him, and yet did not offer to improve his interest in her affections for the gaining of her without her father's consent, but waited till it was proposed to him. And then see, (1.) How highly he speaks of the honour offered him: *To be son-in-law to the king.* Though this king was but an upstart, in his original as mean as himself, in his management no better than he should be, yet, being a crowned head, he speaks of him and the royal family with all due respect. Note, Religion is so far from teaching us to be rude and unmannerly that it does not allow us to be so. We must *render honour to whom honour is due.* (2.) How humbly he speaks of himself: *Who am I?* This did not proceed from a mean, abject, sneaking spirit, for when there was occasion he made it appear that he had as high a sense of honour as most men; nor was it from his jealousy of Saul (though he had reason enough to fear a snake under the green grass), but from his true and deep humility: *Who am I, a poor man, and lightly esteemed?* David had as much reason as any man to value himself. He was of an ancient and honourable family of Judah, a comely person, a great statesman and soldier; his achievements were great, for he had won Goliath's head and Michal's heart. He knew himself destined by the divine counsels to the throne of Israel, and yet, *Who am I, and what is my life?* Note, It well becomes us, however God has advanced us, always to have low thoughts of ourselves. *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* And, if David thus magnified the honour of being son-in-law to the king, how should we magnify the honour of being sons (not in law, but in gospel) to the King of kings! *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us!* Who are we that we should be thus dignified?

3. When the slaying of 100 Philistines was made the condition of David's marrying Saul's daughter he readily closed with it (v. 26): *It pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law upon those terms;* and, before the time given him for the action had expired, he doubled the demand, and slew 200, v. 27. He would not seem to suspect that Saul designed his hurt by it (though he had reason enough), but would rather act as if Saul had meant to consult his honour, and therefore cheerfully undertook it, as became a brave soldier and a true lover, though we may suppose it uneasy to Michal. David hereby discovered likewise, (1.) A great con-

fidence in the divine protection. He knew God was with him, and therefore, whatever Saul hoped, David did not fear falling by the Philistines, though he must needs expose himself much by such an undertaking as this. (2.) A great zeal for the good of his country, which he would not decline any occasion of doing service to, though with the hazard of his life. (3.) A right notion of honour, which consists not so much in being preferred as in deserving to be so. David was then pleased with the thoughts of being the king's son-in-law when he found the honour set at this high price, being more solicitous how to merit it than how to obtain it; nor could he wear it with satisfaction till he had won it.

4. Even after he was married he continued his good services to Israel. When the princes of the Philistines began to move towards another war David was ready to oppose them, and *behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, v. 30.* The law dispensed with men from going to war the first year after they were married (Deut. xxiv. 5), but David loved his country too well to make use of that dispensation. Many that have shown themselves forward to serve the public when they have been in pursuit of preferment have declined it when they have gained their point; but David acted from more generous principles.

III. Observe how God brought good to David out of Saul's project against him. 1. Saul gave him his daughter to be a snare to him, but in this respect that marriage was a kindness to him, that his being Saul's son-in-law made his succeeding him much the less invidious, especially when so many of his sons were slain with him, *ch. xxxi.* 2. Saul thought, by putting him upon dangerous services, to have him taken off, but that very thing confirmed his interest in the people; for the more he did against the Philistines the better they loved him, so that *his name was much set by (v. 30),* which would make his coming to the crown the more easy. Thus God makes even the wrath of man to praise him and serves his designs of kindness to his own people by it.

## CHAP. XIX.

Immediately after David's marriage, which one would have hoped would secure him Saul's affection, we find his troubles coming upon him faster than ever and Saul's enmity to him the cause of all. His death was sowed, and four fair escapes of his from the hurtful sword of Saul we have an account of in this chapter: the first by the prudent mediation of Jonathan (ver. 1-7), the second by his own quickness (ver. 8-10), the third by Michal's fidelity (ver. 11-17), the fourth by Samuel's protection, and a change, for the present, wrought upon Saul, ver. 18-24. Thus God has many ways of preserving his people. Providence is never at a loss.

AND Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. 2 But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill

thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret *place*, and hide thyself: 3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou *art*, and I will commune with my father of thee: and what I see, that I will tell thee. 4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works *have been* to thee-ward very good: 5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest *it*, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? 6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain. 7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

Saul and Jonathan appear here in their different characters, with reference to David.

1. Never was enemy so unreasonably cruel as Saul. He spoke to his son and all his servants *that they should kill David*, r. 1. His projects to take him off had failed, and therefore he proclaims him an out-law, and charges all about him, upon their allegiance, to take the first opportunity to kill David. It is strange that he was not ashamed thus to avow his malice when he could give no reason for it, and that knowing all his servants loved David (for so he had said himself, *ch. xviii. 22*), he was not afraid of provoking them to rebel by this bloody order. Either malice was not then so politic, or justice was not so corrupted as it has been since, or else Saul would have had him indicted, and have suborned witnesses to swear treason against him, and so have had him taken off, as Naboth was, by colour of law. But there is least danger from this undisguised malice. It was strange that he who knew how well Jonathan loved him should expect him to kill him; but he thought that because he was heir to the crown he must needs be as envious at David as himself was. And Providence ordered it thus that he might befriend David's safety.

11. Never was friend so surprisingly kind as Jonathan. *A friend in need is a friend in*

*deed*. Such a one Jonathan was to David. He not only continued to delight much in him, though David's glory eclipsed his, but bravely appeared for him now that the stream ran so strongly against him.

1. He took care for his present security by letting him know his danger (c. 2): "*Take heed to thyself*, and keep out of harm's way." Jonathan knew not but that some of the servants might be either so obsequious to Saul or so envious at David as to put the orders in execution which Saul had given, if they could light on David.

2. He took pains to pacify his father and reconcile him to David. The next morning he ventured to commune with him concerning David (r. 3), not that night, perhaps because he observed Saul to be drunk and not fit to be spoken to, or because he hoped that, when he had slept upon it, he would himself revoke the order, or because he could not have an opportunity of speaking to him till morning.

(1.) His intercession for David was very prudent. It was managed with a great deal of the meekness of wisdom; and he showed himself faithful to his friends by speaking good of him, though he was in danger of incurring his father's displeasure by it—a rare instance of valuable friendship! He pleads, [1.] The good services David had done to the public, and particularly to Saul: *His work has been to thee-ward very good*, r. 4. Witness the relief he had given him against his distemper with his harp, and his bold encounter with Goliath, that memorable action, which did, in effect, save Saul's life and kingdom. He appeals to himself concerning this: *Thou thyself sawest it, and didst rejoice*. In that and other instances it appeared that David was a favourite of heaven and a friend to Israel, as well as a good servant to Saul, for by him the Lord wrought a great *salvation for all Israel*; so that to order him to be slain was not only base ingratitude to so good a servant, but a great affront to God and a great injury to the public. [2.] He pleads his innocency. Though he had formerly done many good offices, yet, if he had now been chargeable with any crimes, it would have been another matter; but *he has not sinned against thee* (r. 1), *his blood is innocent* (r. 5), and, if he be slain, it is without cause. And Jonathan had therefore reason to protest against it because he could not entail any thing upon his family more pernicious than the guilt of innocent blood.

(2.) His intercession, being thus prudent, was prevalent. God inclined the heart of Saul to hearken to the voice of Jonathan. Note, We must be willing to hear reason, and to take all reproofs and good advice even from our inferiors, parents from their own children. How forcible are right words! Saul was, for the present, so far convinced of the unreasonableness of his enmity to

David that, [1.] He recalled the bloody warrant for his execution (v. 6): *As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.* Whether Saul swore here with due solemnity or no does not appear; perhaps he did, and the matter was of such moment as to deserve it and of such uncertainty as to need it. But at other times Saul swore rashly and profanely, which made the sincerity of this oath justly questionable; for it may be feared that those who can so far jest with an oath as to make a by-word of it, and prostitute it to a trifle, have not such a due sense of the obligation of it but that, to serve a turn, they will prostitute it to a lie. Some suspect that Saul said and swore this with a malicious design to bring David within his reach again, intending to take the first opportunity to slay him. But, as bad as Saul was, we can scarcely think so ill of him; and therefore we suppose that he spoke as he thought for the present, but the convictions soon wore off and his corruptions prevailed and triumphed over them. [2.] He renewed the grant of his place at court. Jonathan brought him to Saul, and *he was in his presence as in times past* (v. 7), hoping that now the storm was over, and that his friend Jonathan would be instrumental to keep his father always in this good mind.

8 And there was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him. 9 And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with *his hand*. 10 And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.

Here, I. David continues his good services to his king and country. Though Saul had requited him evil for good, and even his usefulness was the very thing for which Saul envied him, yet he did not therefore retire in sullenness and decline public service. Those that are ill paid for doing good, yet must not be weary of well doing, remembering what a bountiful benefactor our heavenly Father is, even to the froward and unthankful. Notwithstanding the many affronts Saul had given to David, yet we find him, 1. As bold as ever in using his sword for the service of his country, v. 8. The war broke out again with the Philistines, which gave David occasion again to signalize himself. It was with a great deal of bravery that he charged them; and he came off victorious, slaying many and putting the rest to flight.

2. As cheerful as ever in using his harp for the service of the prince. When Saul was disturbed with his former fits of melancholy *David played with his hand*, v. 9. He might have pleaded that this was a piece of service now below him; but a humble man will think nothing below him by which he may do good. He might have objected the danger he was in the last time he performed this service for Saul, *ch. xviii. 10.* But he had learned to render good for evil, and to trust God with his safety in the way of his duty. See how David was affected when his enemy was sick (Ps. xxxv. 13, 14), which perhaps refers to Saul's sickness.

II. Saul continues his malice against David. He that but the other day had sworn by his Maker that David *should not be slain* now endeavours to slay him himself. So implacable, so incurable, is the enmity of the seed of the serpent against that of the woman, so deceitful and desperately wicked is the heart of man without the grace of God, Jer. xvii. 9. The fresh honours David had won in this last war with the Philistines, instead of extinguishing Saul's ill-will to him, and confirming his reconciliation, revived his envy and exasperated him yet more. And, when he indulged this wicked passion, no marvel that *the evil spirit came upon him* (v. 9), for when we *let the sun go down upon our wrath we give place to the devil* (Eph. iv. 26, 27), we make room for him and invite him. Discomposures of mind, though helped forward by the agency of Satan, commonly owe their origin to men's own sins and follies. Saul's fear and jealousy made him a torment to himself, so that he could not sit in his house without a javelin in his hand, pretending it was for his preservation, but designing it for David's destruction; for he endeavoured to nail him to the wall, running at him so violently that he struck the *javelin into the wall* (v. 10), so strong was the devil in him, so strong his own rage and passion. Perhaps he thought that, if he killed David now, he would be excusable before God and man, as being *non compos mentis*—*not in his right mind*, and that it would be imputed to his distraction. But God cannot be deceived by pretences, whatever men may be.

III. God continues his care of David and still watches over him for good. Saul missed his blow. David was too quick for him and fled, and by a kind providence escaped that night. To these preservations, among others, David often refers in his Psalms, when he speaks of God's being his shield and buckler, his rock and fortress, and delivering his *soul from death*.

11 Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to

morrow thou shalt be slain. 12 So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped. 13 And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. 14 And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. 15 And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him. 16 And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster. 17 And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?

Here is, I. Saul's further design of mischief to David. When David had escaped the javelin, supposing he went straight to his own house, as indeed he did, Saul sent some of his guards after him to lay wait at the door of his house, and to assassinate him in the morning as soon as he stirred out, v. 11. Josephus says the design was to seize him and to hurry him before a court of justice that was ordered to condemn him and put him to death as a traitor; but we are here told it was a shorter way they were to take with him: they were ordered to slay him. Well might David complain that his enemies were *bloody men*, as he did in the psalm which he penned at this time, and upon this occasion (Ps. lix.), when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him. See v. 2, 3, and 7. He complains that *swords were in their lips*.

II. David's wonderful deliverance out of this danger. Michal was the instrument of it, whom Saul gave him to be a snare to him, but she proved his protector and helper. Often is the devil out-shot with his own bow. How Michal came to know the danger her husband was in does not appear; perhaps she had notice sent her from court, or rather was herself aware of the soldiers about the house, when they were going to bed, though they kept so still and silent that they said, *Who does hear?* which David takes notice of, Ps. lix. 7. She, knowing her father's great indignation at David, soon suspected the design, and bestirred herself for her husband's safety. 1. She got David out of the danger. She told him how imminent the peril was (v. 11): *To-morrow thou wilt be slain*. As Josephus paraphrases it, she told him that if the sun saw him there next morning it would never see him more; and then put him in a

way of escape. David himself was better versed in the art of fighting than of flying and had it been lawful it would have been easy for him to have cleared his house, by dint of sword, from those that haunted it; but *Michal let him down through a window* (v. 12), all the doors being guarded; and so he *fled and escaped*. And now it was that, either in his own closet before he went or in the hiding-place to which he fled, he penned that fifty-ninth Psalm, which shows that, in his fright and hurry, his mind was composed, and, in this great danger, his faith was strong and fixed on God; and, whereas the plot was to slay him in the morning, he speaks there with the greatest assurance (v. 16), *I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning*. 2. She practised a deception upon Saul and those whom he employed to be the instruments of his cruelty. When the doors of the house were opened in the morning, and David did not appear, the messengers would search the house for him, and did so. But Michal told them he was sick in bed (v. 14), and, if they would not believe her, they might see, for (v. 13) she had put a wooden image in the bed, and wrapped it up close and warm as if it had been David asleep, not in a condition to be spoken to: the goats' hair about the image was to resemble David's hair, the better to impose upon them. Michal can by no means be justified in telling a lie, and covering it thus with a cheat. God's truth needed not her lie. But she intended hereby to keep Saul in suspense for a while, that David might have time to secure himself, not doubting but those messengers would pursue him if they found he had gone. The messengers had so much humanity as not to offer him any disturbance when they heard he was sick; for to those that are in this misery pity should be shown; but Saul, when he heard it, gave positive orders that he should be brought to him sick or well: *Bring him to me in the bed, that I may slay him*, v. 15. It was base and barbarous thus to triumph over a sick man; and to vow the death of one who for aught that he knew was dying by the hand of nature. So earnestly did he thirst after his blood, and so greedy was his revenge, that he could not be pleased to see him dead, unless he himself was the death of him; though awhile ago he had said, *Let not my hand be upon him*. Thus when men lay the reins on the neck of their passions they grow more and more outrageous. When the messengers were sent again, the cheat was discovered, v. 16. But by this time it was to be hoped that David was safe, and therefore Michal was not then much concerned at the discovery. Saul chid her for helping David to escape (v. 17): *Why hast thou deceived me so?* What a base spirit was Saul of, to expect that, because Michal was his daughter, she must therefore betray her own husband to him unjustly. Ought she not to forsake and forget her father and her father's house,

to cleave to her husband? Those that themselves will be held by no bonds of reason or religion are ready to think that others should as easily break those bonds. In answer to Saul's chiding, Michal is not so careful of her husband's reputation as she had been of his person, when she makes this her excuse: *He said, Let me go, why should I kill thee?* As her insinuating that she would have hindered his flight was false (it was she that put him upon it and furthered it), so it was an unjust unworthy reflection upon him to suggest that he threatened to kill her if she would not let him go, and might confirm Saul in his rage against him. David was far from being so barbarous a man and so imperious a husband, so brutish in his resolves and so haughty in his menaces, as she here represented him. But David suffered both from friends and foes, and so did the son of David.

18 So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth. 19 And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. 20 And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. 21 And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. 22 Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu: and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah. 23 And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. 24 And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?

Hereis, I. David's place of refuge. Having got away in the night from his own house, he fled not to Bethlehem to his relations, nor to any of the cities of Israel that had caressed and cried him up, to make an interest in

them for his own preservation; but he ran straight to Samuel and *told him all that Saul had done to him, v. 18.* 1. Because Samuel was the man that had given him assurance of the crown, and his faith in that assurance now beginning to fail, and he being ready to say in his haste (or *in his flight*, as some read it, Ps. cxvi. 11), *All men are liars* ("not only Saul that promised me my life, but Samuel himself that promised me the throne"), whether should he go but to Samuel, for such encouragements, in this day of distress, as would support his faith? In flying to Samuel he made God his refuge, trusting in the *shadow of his wings*; where else can a good man think himself safe? 2. Because Samuel, as a prophet, was best able to advise him what to do in this day of his distress. In the psalm he penned the night before he had lifted up his prayer to God, and now he takes the first opportunity of waiting upon Samuel to receive direction and instruction from God. If we expect answers of peace to our prayers, we must have our ears open to God's word. 3. Because with Samuel there was a college of prophets with whom he might join in praising God, and the pleasure of this exercise would be the greatest relief imaginable to him in his present distress. He met with little rest or satisfaction in Saul's court, and therefore went to seek it in Samuel's church. And, doubtless, what little pleasure is to be had in this world those have it that live a life of communion with God; to this David retired in the time of trouble, Ps. xxvii. 4—6.

II. David's protection in this place: *He and Samuel went and dwelt (or lodged) in Naioth*, where the school of the prophets was, in Ramah, as in a privileged place, for the Philistines themselves would not disturb that meeting, *ch. x. 10.* But Saul, having notice of it by some of his spies (*v. 19*), sent officers to seize David, *v. 20.* When they did not bring him he sent more; when they returned not he sent the third time (*v. 21*), and, hearing no tidings of these, he went himself, *v. 22.* So impatient was he in his thirst after David's blood, so restless to compass his design against him, that, though baffled by one providence after another, he could not perceive that David was under the special protection of Heaven. It was below the king to go himself on such an errand as this; but persecutors will stoop to any thing, and stick at nothing, to gratify their malice. Saul lays aside all public business to hunt David. How was David delivered, now that he was just ready to fall (like his own lamb formerly) into the mouth of the lions? Not as he delivered his lamb, by slaying the lion, or, as Elijah was delivered, by consuming the messengers with *fire from heaven*, but by turning the lions for the present into lambs.

1. When the messengers came into the congregation where David was among the prophets *the Spirit of God* came upon them, and *they prophesied*, that is, they joined with

the rest in praising God. Instead of seizing David, they themselves were seized. And thus, (1.) God secured David; for either they were put into such an ecstasy by the spirit of prophecy that they could not think of any thing else, and so forgot their errand and never minded David, or they were by it put, for the present, into so good a frame that they could not entertain the thought of doing so bad a thing. 2. He put an honour upon the sons of the prophets and the communion of saints, and showed how he can, when he pleases, strike an awe upon the worst of men, by the tokens of his presence in the assemblies of the faithful, and force them to acknowledge that *God is with them of a truth*, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. See also the benefit of religious societies, and what good impressions may be made by them on minds that seemed unapt to receive such impressions. And where may the influences of the Spirit be expected but in the congregations of the saints? (3.) He magnified his power over the spirits of men. He that made the heart and tongue can manage both to serve his own purposes. Balaam prophesied the happiness of Israel, whom he would have cursed; and some of the Jewish writers think these messengers prophesied the advancement of David to the throne of Israel.

2. Saul himself was likewise seized with the spirit of prophecy before he came to the place. One would have thought that so bad a man as he was in no danger of being turned into a prophet; yet, when God will take this way of protecting David, even Saul has no sooner come (as bishop Hall expresses it) within smell of the smoke of Naioth but he prophesies, as his messengers did, v. 23. He stripped off his royal robe and warlike habiliments, because they were either too fine or too heavy for this service, and fell into a trance as it should seem, or into a rapture, which continued all that day and night. The saints at Damascus were delivered from the rage of the New-Testament Saul by a change wrought on his spirit, but of another nature from this. This was only amazing, but that sanctifying—this for a day, that for ever. Note, Many have great gifts and yet no grace, prophesy in Christ's name and yet are disowned by him, Matt. vii. 22, 23. Now the proverb recurs, *Is Saul among the prophets?* See ch. x. 12. Then it was different from what it had been, but now *contrary*. He is rejected of God, and actuated by an evil spirit, and yet among the prophets.

#### CHAP. XX.

David, having several times narrowly escaped Saul's fury, begins to consider at last whether it may not be necessary for him to retire into the country and to take up arms in his own defence. But he will not do so daring a thing without consulting his faithful friend Jonathan; how he did this, and what passed between them, we have an account in this chapter, where we have as surprising instances of supernatural love as we had in the chapter before of unnatural hatred. I. David complains to Jonathan of his present distress, and engages him to be his friend, ver. 1—3. II. Jonathan faithfully promises to get and give him intelligence now his father stood affected to him, and renew the covenant of friendship with him, ver. 9—23. III.

Jonathan, upon trial, finds, to his grief, that his father was implacably enraged against David, ver. 24—34. IV. He gives David notice of this, according to the appointment between them, ver. 35—42.

AND David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life? 2 And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. 3 And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved; but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, *there is* but a step between me and death. 4 Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. 5 And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. 6 If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for *there is* a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. 7 If he say thus, *It is well*; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, *then* be sure that evil is determined by him. 8 Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why should'est thou bring me to thy father?

Here, I. David makes a representation to Jonathan of his present troubles. While Saul lay bound by his trance at Naioth David escaped to the court, and got to speak with Jonathan. And it was happy for him that he had such a friend at court, when he had such an enemy on the throne. If there be those that hate and despise us, let us not be disturbed at that, for there are those also that love and respect us. God hath set the one over against the other, and so must we. Jonathan was a friend that loved at all times, loved David as well now in his distress, and

bade him as welcome into his arms, as he had done when he was in his triumph (*ch. xviii. 1*), and he was *a brother that was born for adversity*, *Prov. xvii. 17*. Now, 1. David appeals to Jonathan himself concerning his innocency, and he needed not say much to him for the proof of it, only he desired him that if he knew of any just offence he had given his father he would tell him, that he might humble himself and beg his pardon: *What have I done? v. 1*. 2. He endeavours to convince him that, notwithstanding his innocency, Saul sought his life. Jonathan, from a principle of filial respect to his father, was very loth to believe that he designed or would ever do so wicked a thing, *v. 2*. He the rather hoped so because he knew nothing of any such design, and he had usually been made privy to all his counsels. Jonathan, as became a dutiful son, endeavoured to cover his father's shame, as far as was consistent with justice and fidelity to David. Charity is not forward to think evil of any, especially of a parent, *1 Cor. xiii. 5*. David therefore gives him the assurance of an oath concerning his own danger, swears the peace upon Saul, that he was in fear of his life by him: *"As the Lord liveth, than which nothing more sure in itself, and as thy soul liveth, than which nothing more certain to thee, whatever thou thinkest, there is but a step between me and death," v. 3*. And, as for Saul's concealing it from Jonathan, it was easy to account for that; he knew the friendship between him and David, and therefore, though in other things he advised with him, yet not in that. None more fit than Jonathan to serve him in every design that was just and honourable, but he knew him to be a man of more virtue than to be his confidant in so base a design as the murder of David.

II. Jonathan generously offers him his service (*v. 4*): *Whatsoever thou desirest*, he needed not insert the proviso of lawful and honest (for he knew David too well to think he would ask any thing that was otherwise), *I will even do it for thee*. This is true friendship. Thus Christ testifies his love to us: *Ask, and it shall be done for you*; and we must testify ours to him by keeping his commandments.

III. David only desires him to satisfy himself, and then to satisfy him whether Saul did really design his death or no. Perhaps David proposed this more for Jonathan's conviction than his own, for he himself was well satisfied. 1. The method of trial he proposed was very natural, and would certainly discover how Saul stood affected to him. The two next days Saul was to dine publicly, upon occasion of the solemnities of the new moon, when extraordinary sacrifices were offered and feasts made upon the sacrifices. Saul was rejected of God, and the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, yet he kept up his observance of the holy feasts. There may be the remains of ex-

ternal devotion where there is nothing but the ruins of real virtue. At these solemn feasts Saul had either all his children to sit with him, and David had a seat as one of them, or all his great officers, and David had a seat as one of *them*. However it was, David resolved his seat should be empty (and that it never used to be at a sacred feast) those two days (*v. 5*), and he would abscond till the solemnity was over, and put it upon this issue: if Saul admitted an excuse for his absence, and dispensed with it, he would conclude he had changed his mind and was reconciled to him; but if he resented it, and was put into a passion by it, it was easy to conclude he designed him a mischief, since it was certain he did not love him so well as to desire his presence for any other end than that he might have an opportunity to do him a mischief, *v. 7*. 2. The excuse he desired Jonathan to make for his absence, we have reason to think, was true, that he was invited by his elder brother to Bethlehem, his own city, to celebrate this new moon with his relations there, because, besides the monthly solemnity in which they held communion with all Israel, they had now a yearly sacrifice, and a holy feast upon it, for *all the family*, *v. 6*. They kept a day of thanksgiving in their family for the comforts they enjoyed, and of prayer for the continuance of them. By this it appears that the family David was of was a very religious family, a house that had a church in it. 3. The arguments he used with Jonathan to persuade him to do this kindness for him were very pressing, *v. 8*. (1.) That he had entered into a league of friendship with him, and it was Jonathan's own proposal: *Thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee*. (2.) That he would by no means urge him to espouse his cause if he was not sure that it was a righteous cause: *"If there be iniquity in me, I am so far from desiring or expecting that the covenant between us should bind thee to be a confederate with me in that iniquity that I freely release thee from it, and wish that thy hand may be first upon me: Slay me thyself."* No honest man will urge his friend to do a dishonest thing for his sake.

9 And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? 10 Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what *if* thy father answer thee roughly? 11 And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. 12 And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded

my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, *if there be good toward David*, and I then send not unto thee, and show it thee; 13 The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father *to do thee evil*, then I will show it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father. 14 And thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: 15 But *also* thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth. 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, *saying*, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. 17 And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. 18 Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. 19 And *when* thou hast stayed three days, *then* thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was *in hand*, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. 20 And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. 21 And, behold, I will send a lad, *saying*, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows *are* on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for *there is peace* to thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth. 22 But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows *are beyond* thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away. 23 And *as touching* the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD *be* between thee and me for ever.

Here, I. Jonathan protests his fidelity to David in his distress. Notwithstanding the strong confidence David had in Jonathan, yet, because he might have some reason to fear that his father's influence, and his own interest, should make him warp, or grow

cool towards him, Jonathan thought it requisite solemnly to renew the professions of his friendship to him (v. 9): "*Far be it from thee* to think that I suspect thee of any crime for which I should either slay thee myself or deliver thee to my father; no, if thou hast any jealousy of that, *Come let us go into the field* (v. 11), and talk it over more fully." He did not challenge him to the field to fight him for an affront, but to fix him in his friendship. He faithfully promised him that he would let him know how, upon trial, he found his father affected towards him, and would make the matter neither better nor worse than it was. "If there be *good towards thee*, I will show it thee, that thou mayest be easy (v. 12), if evil, I will send thee away, that thou mayest be safe" (v. 13); and thus he would help to deliver him from the evil if it were real and from the fear of evil if it were but imaginary. For the confirmation of his promise he appeals to God, 1. As a witness (v. 12): "*O Lord God of Israel*, thou knowest I mean sincerely, and think as I speak." The strength of his passion made the manner of his speaking concise and abrupt. 2. As a judge: "*The Lord do so and much more to Jonathan* (v. 13), if I speak deceitfully, or break my word with my friend." He expressed himself thus solemnly that David might be abundantly assured of his sincerity. And thus God has confirmed his promises to us, that we might have *strong consolation*, Heb. vi. 17, 18. Jonathan adds to his protestations his hearty prayers: "*The Lord be with thee*, to protect and prosper thee, as he has been formerly with my father, though now he has withdrawn." Thus he intimates his belief that David would be in his father's place, and his good wishes that he might prosper in it better than his father now did.

II. He provides for the entail of the covenant of friendship with David upon his posterity, v. 14—16. He engages David to be a friend to his family when he was gone (v. 15): "*Thou shalt promise that thou wilt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever*. This he spoke from a natural affection he had to his children, whom he desired it might go well with after his decease, and for whose future welfare he desired to improve his present interest. It also intimates his firm belief of David's advancement, and that it would be in the power of his hand to do a kindness or unkindness to his seed; for, in process of time, *the Lord would cut off his enemies*, Saul himself not excepted; then "*Do not thou cut off thy kindness from my house, nor revenge my father's wrongs upon my children*." The house of David must likewise be bound to the house of Jonathan from generation to generation; he made a covenant (v. 16) with the house of David. Note, True friends cannot but covet to transmit to theirs after them their mutual affections. *Thy own friend, and thy father's friend,*



*forsake not.* This kindness, 1. He calls *the kindness of the Lord*, because it is such kindness as God shows to those whom he takes into covenant with himself; for he is a God to them and to their seed; they are *beloved for the fathers' sakes*. 2. He secures it by an imprecation (v. 16): *The Lord require it at the hand of David's seed* (for of David himself he had no suspicion) if they prove so far David's enemies as to deal wrongfully with the posterity of Jonathan, David's friend. He feared lest David, or some of his, should hereafter be tempted, for the clearing and confirming of their title to the throne, to do by his seed as Abimelech had done by the sons of Gideon (Judg. ix. 5), and this he would effectually prevent; but the reason given (v. 17) why Jonathan was so earnest to have the friendship entailed is purely generous, and has nothing of self in it; it was because *he loved him as he loved his own soul*, and therefore desired that he and his might be beloved by him. David, though now in disgrace at court and in distress, was as amiable in the eyes of Jonathan as ever he had been, and he loved him never the less for his father's hating him, so pure were the principles on which his friendship was built. Having himself sworn to David, he caused David to swear to him, and (as we read it) *to swear again*, which David consented to (for he that bears an honest mind does not startle at assurances), to swear by his love to him, which he looked upon as a sacred thing. Jonathan's heart was so much upon it that, when they parted this time, he concluded with a solemn appeal to God: *The Lord be between me and thee for ever* (v. 23), that is, "God himself be judge between us and our families for ever, if on either side this league of friendship be violated." It was in remembrance of this covenant that David was kind to Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. ix. 7; xxi. 7. It will be a kindness to ourselves and ours to secure an interest in those whom God favours and to make his friends ours.

III. He settles the method of intelligence, and by what signs and tokens he would give him notice how his father stood affected towards him. David would be missed the first day, or at least the second day, of the new moon, and would be enquired after, v. 18. On the third day, by which time he would have returned from Bethlehem, he must be at such a place (v. 19), and Jonathan would come towards that place with his bow and arrows to shoot for diversion (v. 20), would send his lad to fetch his arrows, and, if they were shot short of the lad, David must take it for a signal of safety, and not be afraid to show his head (v. 21); but, if he shot beyond the lad, it was a signal of danger, and he must shift for his safety, v. 22. This expedient he fixed lest he should not have the opportunity, which yet it proved he had, of talking with David, and making the report by word of mouth.

24 So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat. 25 And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, *even* upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty. 26 Nevertheless Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he *is not clean*: surely he *is not clean*. 27 And it came to pass on the morrow, *which was the second day of the month*, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day? 28 And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked *leave of me to go to Beth-lehem*: 29 And he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me *to be there*: and now, if I have found favour in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table. 30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious *woman*, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of my mother's nakedness? 31 For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die. 32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? 33 And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. 34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.

Jonathan is here effectually convinced of that which he was so loth to believe, that his father had an implacable enmity to David,

and would certainly be the death of him if it were in his power; and he had like to have paid very dearly himself for the conviction.

I. David is missed from the feast on the first day, but nothing is said of him. *The king sat upon his seat*, to feast upon the peace-offerings as at other times (v. 25), and yet had his heart as full of envy and malice against David as it could hold. He should first have been reconciled to him, and then have come and offered his gift; but, instead of that, he hoped, at this feast, to drink the blood of David. What an abomination was that sacrifice which was brought with such a wicked mind as this! Prov. xxi. 27. When the king came to take his seat Jonathan arose, in reverence to him both as a father and as his sovereign; every one knew his place, but David's was empty. It did not use to be so. None more constant than he in attending holy duties; nor had he been absent now but that he must have come at the peril of his life; self-preservation obliged him to withdraw. In imminent peril present opportunities may be waived, nay, we ought not to throw ourselves into the mouth of danger. Christ himself absconded often, till he knew that his hour had come. But that day Saul took no notice that he missed David, but said within himself, "*Surely he is not clean*, v. 26. Some ceremonial pollution has befallen him, which forbids him to eat of the holy things till he has washed his clothes, and bathed his flesh in water, and been unclean until the evening." Saul knew what conscience David made of the law, and that he would rather keep away from the holy feast than come in his uncleanness. Blessed be God, no uncleanness is now a restraint upon us, but what we may by faith and repentance be washed from in the fountain opened, Ps. xxvi. 6.

II. He is enquired for the second day, v. 27. Saul asked Jonathan, who he knew was his confidant, *Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat?* He was his own son by marriage, but he calls him in disdain, *the son of Jesse*. He asks for him as if he were not pleased that he should be absent from a religious feast; and so it should be an example to masters of families to see to it that those under their charge be not absent from the worship of God, either in public or in the family. It is a bad thing for us, except in case of necessity, to omit any opportunity of stately attending on God in solemn ordinances. Thomas lost a sight of Christ by being once absent from a meeting of the disciples. But that which displeased Saul was that hereby he missed the opportunity he expected of doing David a mischief.

III. Jonathan makes his excuse, v. 28, 29.

1. That he was absent upon a good occasion, keeping the feast in another place, though not here, sent for by his elder brother, who was now more respectful to him than he had been (ch. xvii. 28), and that he had gone to

pay his respects to his relations, for the keeping up of brotherly love; and no master would deny a servant liberty to do that in due time. He pleads, 2. That he did not go without leave humbly asked and obtained from Jonathan, who, as his superior officer, was proper to be applied to for it. Thus he represents David as not wanting in any instance of respect and duty to the government.

IV. Saul hereupon breaks out into a most extravagant passion, and rages like a lion disappointed of his prey. David was out of his reach, but he falls upon Jonathan for his sake (v. 30, 31), gives him base language, not fit for a gentleman, a prince, to give to any man, especially his own son, heir apparent to his crown, a son that served him, the greatest stay and ornament of his family, before a great deal of company, at a feast, when all should be in good humour, at a sacred feast, by which all irregular passions should be mortified and subdued; yet he does in effect call him, 1. A bastard: *Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman*; that is, according to the foolish filthy language of men's brutish passion now a day, "Thou son of a whore." He tells him he was born to the confusion of his mother, that is, he had given the world cause to suspect that he was not the legitimate son of Saul, because he loved him whom Saul hated and supported him who would be the destruction of their family. 2. A traitor: *Thou son of perverse rebellion* (so the word is), that is, "thou perverse rebel." At other times he reckoned no counsellor or commander that he had more trusty and well-beloved than Jonathan; yet now in this passion he represents him as dangerous to his crown and life. 3. A fool: *Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse for thy friend to thy own confusion*, for while he lives thou shalt never be established. Jonathan indeed did wisely and well for himself and family to secure an interest in David, whom Heaven had destined to the throne, yet, for this, he is branded as most impolitic. It is good taking God's people for our people and going with those that have him with them. It will prove to our advantage at last, however for the present it may be thought a disparagement, and a prejudice to our secular interest. It is probable Saul knew that David was anointed to the kingdom by the same hand that anointed him, and then not Jonathan, but himself, was the fool, to think to defeat the counsels of God. Yet nothing will serve him but David must die, and Jonathan must fetch him to execution. See how ill Saul's passion looks, and let it warn us against the indulgence of any thing like it in ourselves. Anger is madness, and he that hates his brother is a murderer.

V. Jonathan is sorely grieved and put into disorder by his father's barbarous passion, and the more because he had hoped better things, v. 2. He was troubled for his father, that he should be such a brute, trou-

bled for his friend, whom he knew to be a friend of God, that he should be so basely abused: he was *grieved for David* (v. 34), and troubled for himself too, because *his father had done him shame*, and, though most unjustly, yet he must submit to it. One would pity Jonathan to see how he was put, 1. Into the peril of sin. Much ado that wise and good man had to keep his temper, upon such a provocation as this. His father's reflections upon himself he made no return to; it becomes inferiors to bear with meekness and silence the contempts put upon them in wrath and passion. *When thou art the avil lie thou still.* But his dooming David to die he could not bear: to that he replied with some heat (v. 32), *Wherefore shall he be slain? What has he done?* Generous spirits can much more easily bear to be abused themselves than to hear their friends abused. 2. Into the peril of death. Saul was now so outrageous that he threw his javelin at Jonathan, v. 33. He seemed to be in great care (v. 31) that Jonathan should be established in his kingdom, and yet now he himself aims at his life. What fools, what savage beasts and worse does anger make men! How necessary is it to put a hook in its nose and a bridle in its jaws! Jonathan was fully satisfied that evil was determined against David, which put him out of frame exceedingly: he *rose from table*, thinking it high time when his life was struck at, and *would eat no meat*, for they were not to eat of the holy things in their mourning. All the guests, we may suppose, were discomposed, and the mirth of the feast was spoiled. *He that is cruel troubles his own flesh*, Prov. xi. 17.

35 And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him. 36 And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, *Is not the arrow beyond thee?* 38 And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to nis master. 39 But the lad knew not any thing: only Jonathan and David knew the matter. 40 And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city. 41 And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a *place* toward the south, and fell on

his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. 42 And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

Here is, 1. Jonathan's faithful performance of his promise to give David notice of the success of his dangerous experiment. He went at the time and to the place appointed (v. 35), within sight of which he knew David lay hid, sent his footboy to fetch his arrows, which he would shoot at random (v. 36), and gave David the fatal signal by shooting an arrow beyond the lad (v. 37): *Is not the arrow beyond thee?* That word [*beyond*] David knew the meaning of better than the lad. Jonathan dismissed the lad, who knew nothing of the matter, and, finding the coast clear and no danger of a discovery, he presumed upon one minute's personal conversation with David after he had bidden him flee for his life. 2. The most sorrowful parting of these two friends, who, for aught that appears, never came together again but once, and that was by stealth *in a wood*, ch. xxiii. 16. (1.) David addressed himself to Jonathan with the reverence of a servant rather than the freedom of a friend: *He fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times*, as one deeply sensible of his obligations to him for the good services he had done him. (2.) They took leave of each other with the greatest affection imaginable, with kisses and tears; they wept on each other's neck *till David exceeded*, v. 41. The separation of two such faithful friends was equally grievous to them both, but David's case was the more deplorable; for, when Jonathan was returning to his family and friends, David was leaving all his comforts, even those of God's sanctuary, and therefore his grief exceeded Jonathan's, or perhaps it was because his temper was more tender and his passions were stronger. (3.) They referred themselves to the covenant of friendship that was between them, both of them comforting themselves with this in this mournful separation: "*We have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord*, for ourselves and our heirs, that we and they will be faithful and kind to each other from generation to generation." Thus, while we are at home in the body and absent from the Lord, this is our comfort, that he has *made with us an everlasting covenant*.

## CHAP. XXI.

David has now quite taken leave both of Saul's court and of his camp, has bidden farewell to his alter idem—his other self, the beloved Jonathan; and henceforward to the end of this book he is looked upon and treated as an outlaw and proclaimed a traitor.

We still find him shifting from place to place for his own safety, and Saul pursuing him. His troubles are very particularly related in this and the following chapters, not only to be a key to the Psalms, but that he might be, as other prophets, an example to the saints in all ages, "of suffering affliction, and of patience," and especially that he might be a type of Christ, who, being appointed to the kingdom, humbled himself, and was therefore highly exalted. But the example of the suffering Jesus was a copy without a blot, that of David was not so; witness the records of this chapter, where we find David in his flight, I. Imposing upon Ahimelech the priest, to get from him both victuals and arms, ver. 1-9. II. Imposing upon Achish, king of Gath, by feigning himself mad, ver. 10-15. Justly are troubles called temptations, for many are by them drawn into sin.

**T**HEN came David to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, *Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?* 2 And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, *The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.* 3 Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. 4 And the priest answered David, and said, *There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women.* 5 And David answered the priest, and said unto him, *Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel.* 6 So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the showbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away. 7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul. 8 And David said unto Ahimelech, *And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.* 9 And the priest said, *The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the*

valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is no other save that here. And David said, *There is none like that; give it me.*

Here, I. David, in distress, flies to the tabernacle of God, now pitched at Nob, supposed to be a city in the tribe of Benjamin. Since Shiloh was forsaken, the tabernacle was often removed, though the ark still remained at Kirjath-jearim. Hither David came in his flight from Saul's fury (v. 1), and applied to Ahimelech the priest. Samuel the prophet could not protect him, Jonathan the prince could not. He therefore has recourse next to Ahimelech the priest. He foresees he must now be an exile, and therefore comes to the tabernacle, 1. To take an affecting leave of it, for he knows not when he shall see it again, and nothing will be more afflictive to him in his banishment than his distance from the house of God, and his restraint from public ordinances, as appears by many of his psalms. He had given an affectionate farewell to his friend Jonathan, and cannot go till he has given the like to the tabernacle. 2. To enquire of the Lord there, and to beg direction from him in the way both of duty and safety, his case being difficult and dangerous. That this was his business appears ch. xxii. 10, where it is said that *Ahimelech enquired of the Lord for him*, as he had done formerly, v. 15. It is a great comfort to us in a day of trouble that we have a God to go to, to whom we may open our case, and from whom we may ask and expect direction.

II. Ahimelech the priest is surprised to see him in so poor an equipage; having heard that he had fallen into disgrace at court, he looked shy upon him, as most are apt to do upon their friends when the world frowns upon them. He was afraid of incurring Saul's displeasure by entertaining him, and took notice how mean a figure he now made to what he used to make: *Why art thou alone?* He had some with him (as appears Mark ii. 26), but they were only his own servants; he had none of the courtiers, no persons of quality with him, as he used to have at other times, when he came to enquire of the Lord. He says (Ps. xlii. 4) he was wont to go with a multitude to the house of God; and, having now but two or three with him, Ahimelech might well ask, *Why art thou alone?* He that was suddenly advanced from the solitude of a shepherd's life to the crowds and hurries of the camp is now as soon reduced to the desolate condition of an exile and is alone like a sparrow on the housetop, such changes are there in this world and so uncertain are its smiles! Those that are courted to-day may be deserted to-morrow.

III. David, under pretence of being sent

by Saul upon public services, solicits Ahimelech to supply his present wants, *v. 2, 3.*

1. Here David did not behave like himself. He told Ahimelech a gross untruth, that Saul had ordered him business to despatch, that his attendants were dismissed to such a place, and that he was charged to observe secrecy and therefore durst not communicate it, no, not to the priest himself. This was all false. What shall we say to this? The scripture does not conceal it, and we dare not justify it. It was ill done, and proved of bad consequence; for it occasioned the death of the priests of the Lord, as David reflected upon it afterwards with regret, *ch. xxii. 22.* It was needless for him thus to dissemble with the priest, for we may suppose that, if he had told him the truth, he would have sheltered and relieved him as readily as Samuel did, and would have known the better how to advise him and enquire of God for him. People should be free with their faithful ministers. David was a man of great faith and courage, and yet now both failed him, and he fell thus foully through fear and cowardice, and both owing to the weakness of his faith. Had he trusted God aright, he would not have used such a sorry sinful shift as this for his own preservation. It is written, not for our imitation, no, not in the greatest straits, but for our admonition. *Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall;* and let us all pray daily, *Lord, lead us not into temptation.* Let us all take occasion from this to lament, (1.) The weakness and imperfection of good men; the best are not perfect on this side heaven. There may be true grace where yet there are many failings. (2.) The wickedness of bad times, which forces good men into such straits as prove temptations too strong for them. Oppression makes a wise man do foolishly.

2. Two things David begged of Ahimelech, *bread and a sword.*

(1.) He wanted bread: *Five loaves, v. 3.* Travelling was then troublesome, when men generally carried their provisions with them in kind, having little money and no public houses, else David would not now have had to seek for bread. It seems David had known the *seed of the righteous begging bread* occasionally, but not constantly, *Ps. xxxvii. 25.* Now, [1.] The priest objected that he had none but hallowed bread, *show-bread*, which had stood a week on the golden table in the sanctuary, and was taken thence for the use of the priests and their families, *v. 4.* It seems the priest kept no good house, but wanted either a heart to be hospitable or provisions wherewithal to be so. Ahimelech thinks that the young men that attended David might not eat of this bread unless they had for some time abstained from women, even from their own wives; this was required at the *giving of the law* (*Exod. xix. 15*), but otherwise we never find this made the matter of any ceremonial purity on the one side or

pollution on the other, and therefore the priest here seems to be over-nice, not to say superstitious. [2.] David pleads that he and those that were with him, in this case of necessity, might lawfully eat of the hallowed bread, for they were not only able to answer his terms of keeping from women for three days past, but *the vessels* (that is, the bodies) *of the young men were holy, being possessed in sanctification and honour at all times* (*1 Thess. iv. 4, 5*), and therefore God would take particular care of them, that they wanted not necessary supports, and would have his priest to do so. Being thus holy, holy things were not forbidden to them. Poor and pious Israelites were in effect priests to God, and, rather than be starved, might feed on the bread which was appropriated to the priests. Believers are spiritual priests, and the offerings of the Lord shall be their inheritance; they eat the bread of their God. He pleads that the bread is in a manner common, now that what was primarily the religious use of it is over; especially (as our margin reads it) *when there is other bread* (*hot, v. 6*) *sanctified this day in the vessel, and put in the room of it upon the table.* This was David's plea, and the Son of David approves it, and shows from it that mercy is to be preferred to sacrifice, that ritual observances must give way to moral duties, and that that may be done in a case of an urgent providential necessity which may not otherwise be done. He brings it to justify his disciples in plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day, for which the Pharisees censured them, *Matt. xii. 3, 4.* [3.] Ahimelech hereupon supplies him: *He gave him hallowed bread* (*v. 6*), and some think it was about this that *he enquired of the Lord, ch. xxii. 10.* As a faithful servant he would not dispose of his master's provisions without his master's leave. This bread, we may suppose, was the more agreeable to David for its being hallowed, so precious were all sacred things to him. The show-bread was but twelve loaves in all, yet out of these he gave David five (*v. 3*), though they had no more in the house; but he trusted Providence.

(2.) He wanted a sword. Persons of quality, though officers of the army, did not then wear their swords so constantly as now they do, else surely David would not have been without one. It was a wonder that Jonathan did not furnish him with his, as he had before done, *ch. xviii. 4.* However, it happened that he had now no weapons with him, the reason of which he pretends to be because he came away in haste, *v. 8.* Those that are furnished with the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith cannot be disarmed of them, nor need they, at any time, to be at a loss. But the priests, it seems, had no swords: the weapons of their warfare were not carnal. There was not a sword to be found about the tabernacle but the sword of Goliath, which was laid up

behind the ephod, as a monument of the glorious victory David obtained over him. Probably David had an eye to that when he asked the priest to help him with a sword; for, that being mentioned, O! says he, *there is none like that, give it to me, v. 9.* He could not use Saul's armour, for he had not proved it; but this sword of Goliath he had made trial of and done execution with. By this it appears that he was now well grown in strength and stature, that he could wear and wield such a sword as that. God had *taught his hands to war*, so that he could do wonders, Ps. xviii. 34. Two things we may observe concerning this sword:—[1.] That God had graciously given it to him, as a pledge of his singular favour; so that whenever he drew it, nay, whenever he looked upon it, it would be a great support to his faith, by bringing to mind that great instance of the particular care and countenance of the divine providence respecting him. Experiences are great encouragements. [2.] That he had gratefully given it back to God, dedicating it to him and to his honour as a token of his thankfulness; and now in his distress it stood him greatly in stead. Note, What we devote to God's praise, and serve him with, is most likely to redound, one way or other, to our own comfort and benefit. What we gave we have.

Thus was David well furnished with arms and victuals; but it fell out very unhappily that there was one of Saul's servants then attending before the Lord, *Doeg* by name, that proved a base traitor both to David and to Ahimelech. He was by birth an Edomite (v. 7), and though proselyted to the Jewish religion, to get the preferment he now had under Saul, yet he retained the ancient and hereditary enmity of Edom to Israel. He was master of the herds, which perhaps was then a place of as much honour as master of the horse is now. Some occasion or other he had at this time to wait on the priest, either to be purified from some pollution or to pay some vow; but, whatever his business was, it is said, he was *detained before the Lord*. He must attend and could not help it, but he was sick of the service, *snuffed at it, and said, What a weariness is it!* Mal. i. 13. He would rather have been any where else than before the Lord, and therefore, instead of minding the business he came about, was plotting to do David a mischief and to be revenged on Ahimelech for detaining him. God's sanctuary could never secure itself from such wolves in sheep's clothing. See Gal. ii. 4.

10 And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said unto him, *Is not this David the king of the land?* did they not sing one to an-

other of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? 12 And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. 14 Then said Achish unto his servants, *Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me?* 15 *Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?*

David, though king elect, is here an exile—designed to be master of vast treasures, yet just now begging his bread—anointed to the crown, and yet here forced to flee from his country. Thus do God's providences sometimes seem to run counter to his promises, for the trial of his people's faith, and the glorifying of his name, in the accomplishment of his counsels, notwithstanding the difficulties that lay in the way. Here is, 1. David's flight into the land of the Philistines, where he hoped to be hid, and to remain undiscovered in the court or camp of Achish king of Gath, v. 10. Israel's darling is necessitated to quit the land of Israel, and he that was the Philistine's great enemy (upon I know not what inducements) goes to seek for shelter among them. It should seem that as, though the Israelites loved him, yet the king of Israel had a personal enmity to him, which obliged him to leave his own country, so, though the Philistines hated him, yet the king of Gath had a personal kindness for him, valuing his merit, and perhaps the more for his killing Goliath of Gath, who, it may be, had been no friend to Achish. To him David now went directly, as to one he could confide in, as afterwards (ch. xxvii. 2, 3), and Achish would now have protected him but that he was afraid of disobliging his own people. God's persecuted people have often found better usage from Philistines than from Israelites, in the Gentile theatres than in the Jewish synagogues. The king of Judah imprisoned Jeremiah, and the king of Babylon set him at liberty. 2. The disgust which the servants of Achish took at his being there, and their complaint of it to Achish (v. 11): "*Is not this David?*" Is not this he that has triumphed over the Philistines? witness that burden of the song which was so much talked of, *Saul has slain his thousands, but David, this very man, his ten thousands.* Nay, Is not this he that (if our intelligence from the land of Israel be true) is, or is to be, *king of the land?*" As such,

he must be an enemy to our country; and is it safe or honourable for us to protect or entertain such a man?" Achish perhaps had intimated to them that it would be policy to entertain David, because he was now an enemy to Saul, and he might be hereafter a friend to them. It is common for the outlaws of a nation to be sheltered by the enemies of that nation. But the servants of Achish objected to his politics, and thought it not at all fit that he should stay among them. 3. The fright which this put David into. Though he had some reason to put confidence in Achish, yet, when he perceived the servants of Achish jealous of him, he began to be afraid that Achish would be obliged to deliver him up to them, and he was *sorely afraid* (v. 12), and perhaps he was the more apprehensive of his own danger, when he was thus discovered, because he wore Goliath's sword, which, we may suppose, was well known in Gath, and with which he had reason to expect they would cut off his head, as he had cut off Goliath's with it. David now learned by experience what he has taught us (Ps. cxviii. 9), *that it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes*. Men of high degree are a lie, and, if we make them our hope, they may prove our fear. It was at this time that David penned Psalm lv. (*Michtam, a golden psalm*), *when the Philistines took him in Gath*, where having shown before God his distresses, he resolves (v. 3), "*What time I am afraid I will trust in thee*; and therefore (v. 11) *will not be afraid what man can do unto me*, no, not the sons of the giant." 4. The course he took to get out of their hands: *He feigned himself mad*, v. 13. He used the gestures and fashions of a natural fool, or one that had gone out of his wits, supposing they would be ready enough to believe that the disgrace he had fallen into, and the troubles he was now in, had driven him distracted. This dissimulation of his cannot be justified (it was a mean thing thus to disparage himself, and inconsistent with truth thus to misrepresent himself, and therefore not becoming the honour and sincerity of such a man as David); yet it may in some degree be excused, for it was not a downright lie and it was like a stratagem in war, by which he imposed upon his enemies for the preservation of his own life. What David did here in pretence and for his own safety, which made it partly excusable, drunkards do really, and only to gratify a base lust: they make fools of themselves and change their behaviour; their words and actions commonly are either as silly and ridiculous as an idiot's or as furious and outrageous as a madman's, which has often made me wonder that ever men of sense and honour should allow themselves in it. 5. His escape by this means, v. 14, 15. I am apt to think Achish was aware that the delirium was but counterfeit, but, being desirous to protect David (as we find after-

wards he was very kind to him, even when the lords of the Philistines favoured him not, ch. xxviii. 1, 2; xxix. 6), he pretended to his servants that he really thought he was mad, and therefore had reason to question whether it was David or no; or, if it were, they need not fear him, what harm could he do them now that his reason had departed from him? They suspected that Achish was inclined to entertain him: "Not I," says he. "He is a madman. I'll have nothing to do with him. You need not fear that I should employ him, or give him any countenance. He humours the thing well enough when he asks, "*Have I need of madmen? Shall this fool come into my house?*" I will show him no kindness, but then you shall do him no hurt, for, if he be a madman, he is to be pitied." He therefore *drove him away*, as it is in the title of Ps. xxxiv, which David penned upon this occasion, and an excellent psalm it is, and shows that he did not change his spirit when he changed his behaviour, but even in the greatest difficulties and hurries his *heart was fixed*, trusting in the Lord; and he concludes that psalm with this assurance, *that none of those that trust in God shall be desolate*, though they may be, as he now was, solitary and distressed, *persecuted, but not forsaken*.

## CHAP. XXII.

David, being driven from Achish, returns into the land of Israel to be hunted by Saul. 1. David sets up his standard in the cave of Adullam, entertains his relations (ver. 1), enlists soldiers (ver. 2), but removes his aged parents to a more quiet settlement (ver. 3, 4), and has the prophet Gad for his counsellor, ver. 5. Saul resolves to pursue him and find him out, complains of his servants and Jonathan (ver. 6—8), and, finding by Doeg's information that Ahimelech had been kind to David, he ordered him and all the priests that were with him, eighty-five in all, to be put to death, and all that belonged to them destroyed (ver. 9—19) from the barbarous execution of which sentence Abiathar escaped to David, ver. 20—23.

**D**AVID therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard *it*, they went down thither to him. 2 And every one *that was* in distress, and every one *that was* in debt, and every one *that was* discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men. 3 And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, *and be* with you, till I know what God will do for me. 4 And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold. 5 And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee

into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth.

Here, I. David shelters himself in the cave of Adullam, v. 1. Whether it was a natural or artificial fastness does not appear; it is probable that the access to it was so difficult that David thought himself able, with Goliath's sword, to keep it against all the forces of Saul, and therefore buried himself alive in it, while he was waiting to see (as he says here, v. 3) what God would do with him. The promise of the kingdom implied a promise of preservation to it, and yet David used proper means for his own safety, otherwise he would have tempted God. He did not do any thing that aimed to destroy Saul, but only to secure himself. He that might have done great service to his country as a judge or general is here shut up in a cave, and thrown by as a vessel in which there was no pleasure. We must not think it strange if sometimes shining lights be thus eclipsed and hidden under a bushel. Perhaps the apostle refers to this instance of David, among others, when he speaks of some of the Old-Testament worthies that *wandered in deserts, in dens and caves of the earth*, Heb. xi. 38. It was at this time that David penned Psalm cxlii., which is entitled, *A prayer when David was in the cave*; and there he complains that *no man would know him* and that refuge failed him, but hopes that shortly the *righteous would compass him about*.

II. Thither his relations flocked to him, his brethren and all his father's house, to be protected by him, to give assistance to him, and to take their lot with him. *A brother is born for adversity*. Now Joab, and Abishai, and the rest of his relations, came to him, to suffer and venture with him, in hopes shortly to be advanced with him; and they were so. The first three of his worthies were those that first owned him when he was in the cave, 1 Chron. xi. 15, &c.

III. Here he began to raise forces in his own defence, v. 2. He found by the late experiments he had made that he could not save himself by flight, and therefore was necessitated to do it by force, wherein he never acted offensively, never offered any violence to his prince nor gave any disturbance to the peace of the kingdom, but only used his forces as a guard to his own person. But, whatever defence his soldiers were to him, they did him no great credit, for the regiment he had was made up not of great men, nor rich men, nor stout men, no, nor good men, but men *in distress, in debt, and discontented*, men of broken fortunes and restless spirits, that were put to their shifts, and knew not well what to do with themselves. When David had fixed his headquarters in the cave of Adullam, they came and enlisted themselves under him to the number of about 400. See what weak in-

struments God sometimes makes use of, by which to bring about his own purposes. The Son of David is ready to receive distressed souls, that will appoint him their captain and be commanded by him.

IV. He took care to settle his parents in a place of safety. No such place could he find in all the land of Israel while Saul was so bitterly enraged against him and all that belonged to him for his sake; he therefore goes with them to the king of Moab, and puts them under his protection, v. 3, 4. Observe here, 1. With what a tender concern he provided for his aged parents. It was not fit they should be exposed either to the frights or to the fatigues which he must expect during his struggle with Saul (their age would by no means bear such exposure); therefore the first thing he does is to find them a quiet habitation, whatever became of himself. Let children learn from this to *show piety at home and requite their parents* (1 Tim. v. 4), in every thing consulting their ease and satisfaction. Though ever so highly preferred, and ever so much employed, let them not forget their aged parents. 2. With what a humble faith he expects the issue of his present distresses: *Till I know what God will do for me*. He expresses his hopes very modestly, as one that had entirely cast himself upon God and committed his way to him, expecting a good issue, not from his own arts, or arms, or merits, but from what the wisdom, power, and goodness of God would do for him. Now David's father and mother forsook him, but God did not, Ps. xxvii. 10.

V. He had the advice and assistance of the prophet Gad, who probably was one of the sons of the prophets that were brought up under Samuel, and was by him recommended to David for his chaplain or spiritual guide. Being a prophet, he would pray for him and instruct him in the mind of God; and David, though he was himself a prophet, was glad of his assistance. He advised him to go into the land of Judah (v. 5), as one that was confident of his own innocency, and was well assured of the divine protection, and was desirous, even in his present hard circumstances, to do some service to his tribe and country. Let him not be ashamed to own his own cause nor decline the succours that would be offered him. Animated by this word, there he determined to appear publicly. Thus are the steps of a good man ordered by the Lord.

6 When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeath under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him;) 7 Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give



every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; 8 That all of you have conspired against me, and *there is* none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and *there is* none of you that is sorry for me, or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? 9 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. 10 And he enquired of the LORD for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine. 11 Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that *were* in Nob: and they came all of them to the king. 12 And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I *am*, my lord. 13 And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast enquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? 14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who *is* so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house? 15 Did I then begin to enquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute *any* thing unto his servant, *nor* to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more. 16 And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house. 17 And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also *is* with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not show it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD. 18

And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. 19 And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

We have seen the progress of David's troubles; now here we have the progress of Saul's wickedness. He seems to have laid aside the thoughts of all other business and to have devoted himself wholly to the pursuit of David. He heard at length, by the common fame of the country, that David *was discovered* (that is, that he appeared publicly and enlisted men into his service); and hereupon he called all his servants about him, and sat down under a tree, or grove, in the high place at Gibeah, with his spear in his hand for a sceptre, intimating the force by which he designed to rule, and the present temper of his spirit, or its distemper rather, which was to kill all that stood in his way. In this bloody court of inquisition.

I. Saul seeks for information against David and Jonathan, c. 7, 8. Two things he was willing to suspect and desirous to see proved, that he might wreak his malice upon two of the best and most excellent men he had about him:—1. That his servant David did *lie in wait* for him and seek his life, which was utterly false. He really sought David's life, and therefore pretended that David sought his life, though he could not charge him with any overt act that gave the least shadow of suspicion. 2. That his son Jonathan stirred him up to do so, and was confederate with him in compassing and imagining the death of the king. This also was notoriously false. A league of friendship there was between David and Jonathan, but no conspiracy in any evil thing; none of the articles of their covenant carried any mischief to Saul. If Jonathan had agreed, after the death of Saul, to resign to David, in compliance with the revealed will of God, what harm would that do to Saul? Yet thus the best friends to their prince and country have often been odiously represented as enemies to both; even Christ himself was so. Saul took it for granted that Jonathan and David were in a plot against him, his crown and dignity, and was displeased with his servants that they did not give him information of it, supposing that they could not but know it; whereas really there was no such thing. See the nature of a jealous malice, and its pitiful arts to extort discoveries of things that are not. He looked upon all about him as his enemies because they did not say just as he said; and told

them, (1.) That they were very unwise, and acted against the interest both of their tribe (for they were Benjamites, and David, if he were advanced, would bring the honour into Judah which was now in Benjamin) and of their families; for David would never be able to give them such rewards as he had for them, of *fields and vineyards*, and such preferments, to be colonels and captains. (2.) That they were unfaithful: *You have conspired against me.* What a continual agitation and torment are those in that give way to a spirit of jealousy! *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked* (Prov. xxix. 12), that is, they seem to be so in his eyes. (3.) That they were very unkind. He thought to work upon their good nature with that word: *There is none of you that is so much as sorry for me, or solicitous for me*, as some read it. By these reasonings he stirred them up to act vigorously, as the instruments of his malice, that they might take away his suspicions of them.

II. Though he could not learn any thing from his servants against David or Jonathan, yet he got information from Doeg against Ahimelech the priest.

1. An indictment is brought against Ahimelech by Doeg, and he himself is evidence against him, r. 9, 10. Perhaps Doeg, as bad as he was, would not have given this information if Saul had not extorted it, for had he been very forward to it he would have done it sooner: but now he thinks they must be all deemed traitors if none of them be accusers, and therefore tells Saul what kindness Ahimelech had shown to David, which he himself happened to be an eye-witness of. He had *enquired of God for him* (which the priest used not to do but for public persons and about public affairs) and he had furnished him with *bread and a sword*. All this was true; but it was not the whole truth. He ought to have told Saul further that David had made Ahimelech believe he was then going upon the king's business; so that what service he did to David, however it proved, was designed in honour to Saul, and this would have cleared Ahimelech, whom Saul had in his power, and would have thrown all the blame upon David, who was out of his reach.

2. Ahimelech is seized, or summoned rather to appear before the king, and upon this indictment he is arraigned. The king sent for him and all the priests who then attended the sanctuary, whom he supposed to be aiding and abetting; and they, not being conscious of any guilt, and therefore not apprehensive of any danger, *came all of them to the king* (r. 11), and none of them attempted to make an escape, or to flee to David for shelter, as they would have done now that he had set up his standard if they had been as much in his interests as Saul suspected they were. Saul arraigns Ahimelech himself with the utmost disdain and indignation (r. 12):

*Hear now, thou son of Ahitub*; not so much as calling him by his name, much less giving him his title of distinction. By this it appears that he had cast off the fear of God, that he showed no respect at all to his priests, but took a pleasure in affronting them and insulting them. Ahimelech holds up his hand at the bar in those words: *"Here I am, my lord, ready to hear my charge, knowing I have done no wrong."* He does not object to the jurisdiction of Saul's court, nor insist upon an exemption as a priest, no, not though he is a high priest, to which office that of the judge, or chief magistrate, had not long since been annexed; but Saul having now the sovereignty vested in him, in things pertaining to the king, even the high priest sets himself on a level with common Israelites. *Let every soul be subject* (even clergymen) *to the higher powers.*

3. His indictment is read to him (r. 13), that he, as a false traitor, had joined himself with the son of Jesse in a plot to depose and murder the king. "His design" (says Saul) "was to *rise up against me*, and thou didst assist him with victuals and arms." See what bad constructions the most innocent actions are liable to, how unsafe those are that live under a tyrannical government, and what reason we have to be thankful for the happy constitution and administration of the government we are under.

4. To this indictment he pleads, Not guilty, r. 14, 15. He owns the fact, but denies that he did it traitorously or maliciously, or with any design against the king. He pleads that he was so far from knowing of any quarrel between Saul and David that he really took David to have been then as much in favour at court as ever he had been. Observe, He does not plead that David had told him an untruth, and with that had imposed upon him, though really it was so, because he would not proclaim the weakness of so good a man, no, not for his own vindication, especially to Saul, who sought all occasions against him; but he insists upon the settled reputation David had, as the most faithful of all the servants of Saul, the honour the king had put upon him in marrying his daughter to him, the use the king had often made of him, and the trust he had reposed in him: "He goes at thy bidding, and is honourable in thy house, and therefore any one would think it a meritorious piece of service to the crown to show him respect, so far from apprehending it to be a crime." He pleads that he had been wont to *enquire of God for him* when he was sent by Saul upon any expedition, and did it now as innocently as ever he had done it. He protests his abhorrence of the thought of being in a plot against the king: "Be it far from me. I mind my own business, and meddle not with state matters." He begs the king's favour: "Let him not impute any crime to us;" and concludes with a declaration of his in-

nocency: *Thy servant knew nothing of all this.* Could any man plead with more evidences of sincerity? Had he been tried by a jury of honest Israelites, he would certainly have been acquitted, for who can find any fault in him? But,

5. Saul himself gives judgment against him (v. 16): *Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, as a rebel, thou and all thy father's house.* What could be more unjust? *I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there,* Eccl. iii. 16. (1.) It was unjust that Saul should himself, himself alone, give judgment in his own cause, without any appeal to judge or prophet, to his privy council, or to a council of war. (2.) That so fair a plea should be overruled and rejected without any reason given, or any attempt to disprove the allegations of it, but purely with a high hand. (3.) That sentence should be passed so hastily and with so much precipitation, the judge taking no time himself to consider of it, nor allowing the prisoner any time to move in arrest of judgment. (4.) That the sentence should be passed not only on Ahimelech himself, who was the only person accused by Doeg, but on *all his father's house*, against whom nothing was alleged: must the children be put to death for the fathers? (5.) That the sentence should be pronounced in passion, not for the support of justice, but for the gratification of his brutish rage.

6. He issues out a warrant (a verbal warrant only) for the immediate execution of this bloody sentence.

(1.) He ordered his footmen to be the executioners of this sentence, but they refused, r. 17. Hereby he intended to put a further disgrace upon the priests; they may not die by the hands of the men of war (as 1 Kings ii. 29) or his usual ministers of justice, but his footmen must triumph over them, and wash their hands in their blood. [1.] Never was the command of a prince more barbarously given: *Turn and slay the priests of the Lord.* This is spoken with such an air of impiety as can scarcely be paralleled. Had he seemed to forget their sacred office or relation to God, and taken no notice of that, he would thereby have intimated some regret that men of that character should fall under his displeasure; but to call them *the priests of the Lord*, when he ordered his footmen to cut their throats, looked as if, upon that very account, he hated them. God having rejected him, and ordered another to be anointed in his room, he seems well pleased with this opportunity of being revenged on the priests of the Lord, since God himself was out of his reach. What wickedness will not the evil spirit hurry men to, when he gets the dominion! He alleged, in his order, that which was utterly false and unproved to him, that they knew when David fled; whereas they knew nothing of the matter. But malice and murder are commonly supported with lies. [2.] Never was the command of a prince

more honourably disobeyed. The footmen had more sense and grace than their master. Though they might expect to be turned out of their places, if not punished and put to death for their refusal, yet, come on them what would, they would not offer to fall upon the priests of the Lord, such a reverence had they for their office, and such a conviction of their innocence.

(2.) He ordered Doeg (the accuser) to be the executioner, and he obeyed. One would have thought that the footmen's refusal would awaken Saul's conscience, and that he would not insist upon the doing of a thing so barbarous as that his footmen started at the thought of it. But his mind was blinded and his heart hardened, and, if they will not do it, the hands of the witness shall be upon the victims, Deut. xvii. 7. The most bloody tyrants have found out instruments of their cruelty as barbarous as themselves. Doeg is no sooner commanded to fall upon the priests than he does it willingly enough, and, meeting with no resistance, slays with his own hand (for aught that appears) on that same day eighty-five priests that were of the age of ministration, between twenty and fifty, for they wore a *linen ephod* (v. 18), and perhaps appeared at this time before Saul in their habits, and were slain in them. This (one would think) was enough to satiate the most blood-thirsty; but the horseleech of persecution still cries, "Give, give." Doeg, by Saul's order no doubt, having murdered the priests, went to their city Nob, and put all to the sword there (v. 19), *men, women, and children*, and the cattle too. Barbarous cruelty, and such as one cannot think of without horror! Strange that ever it should enter into the heart of man to be so impious, so inhuman! We may see in this, [1.] The desperate wickedness of Saul when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Nothing so vile but those may be hurried to it who have provoked God to give them up to their hearts' lusts. He that was so compassionate as to spare Agag and the cattle of the Amalekites, in disobedience to the command of God, could now, with unrelenting bowels, see the priests of the Lord murdered, and nothing spared of all that belonged to them. For that sin God left him to this. [2.] The accomplishment of the threatenings long since pronounced against the house of Eli; for Ahimelech and his family were descendants from him. Though Saul was unrighteous in doing this, yet God was righteous in permitting it. Now God performed against Eli that at which the ears of those that heard it must needs tingle, as he had told him that he would *judge his house for ever* ch. iii. 11—13. No word of God shall fall to the ground. [3.] This may be considered as a great judgment upon Israel, and the just punishment of their desiring a king before the time God intended them one

How deplorable was the state of religion at this time in Israel! Though the ark had long been in obscurity, yet it was some comfort to them that they had the altar, and priests to serve at it; but now to see their priests weltering in their own blood, and the heirs of the priesthood too, and the city of the priests made a desolation, so that the altar of God must needs be neglected for want of attendants, and this by the unjust and cruel order of their own king to satisfy his brutish rage—this could not but go to the heart of all pious Israelites, and make them wish a thousand times they had been satisfied with the government of Samuel and his sons. The worst enemies of their nation could not have done them a greater mischief.

20 And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. 21 And Abiathar showed David that Saul had slain the LORD's priests. 22 And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house. 23 Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.

Here is, 1. The escape of Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, out of the desolations of the priests' city. Probably when his father went to appear, upon Saul's summons, he was left at home to attend the altar, by which means he escaped the first execution, and, before Doeg and his bloodhounds came to Nob, he had intelligence of the danger, and had time to shift for his own safety. And whither should he go but to David? r. 20. Let those that suffer for the Son of David commit the keeping of their souls to him, 1 Pet. iv. 19. 2. David's resentment of the melancholy tidings he brought. He gave David an account of the bloody work Saul had made among the priests of the Lord (r. 21), as the disciples of John, when their master was beheaded, went and told Jesus, Matt. xiv. 12. And David greatly lamented the calamity itself, but especially his being accessory to it: *I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house, r. 22.* Note, It is a great trouble to a good man to find himself in any way an occasion of the calamities of the church and ministry. David knew Doeg's character so well that he feared he would do some such mischief as this when he saw him at the sanctuary: *I knew he would tell Saul.* He calls him *Doeg the Edomite*, because he retained the heart of an Edomite, though, by embracing the profession of the Jewish religion, he had put on the mask of

an Israelite. 3. The protection he granted to Abiathar. He perceived him to be terrified, as he had reason to be, and therefore bade him not to fear, he would be as careful for him as for himself: *With me thou shalt be in safeguard, r. 23.* David, having now time to recollect himself, speaks with assurance of his own safety, and promises that Abiathar shall have the full benefit of his protection. It is promised to the Son of David that God will *hide him in the shadow of his hand* (Isa. xlix. 2), and, with him, all that are his may be sure that they shall be in safeguard, Ps. xci. 1. David had now not only a prophet, but a priest, a high-priest, with him, to whom he was a blessing and they to him, and both a happy omen of his success. Yet it appears (by *ch. xxviii. 6*) that Saul had a high priest too, for he had a urim to consult: it is supposed that he preferred Ahitub the father of Zadok, of the family of Eleazar (1 Chron. vi. 8), for even those that hate the power of godliness yet will not be without the form. It must not be forgotten here that David at this time penned Psalm lii., as appears by the title of that psalm, wherein he represents Doeg not only as malicious and spiteful, but as false and deceitful, because though what he said was, for the substance of it, true, yet he put false colours upon it, with a design to do mischief. Yet even then, when the priesthood had become as a withered branch, he looks upon himself as a *green olive-tree in the house of God*, Ps. liii. 8. In this great hurry and distraction that David was continually in, yet he found both time and a heart for communion with God, and found comfort in it.

## CHAP. XXIII.

Saul, having made himself drunk with the blood of the priests of the Lord, is here, in this chapter, seeking David's life, who appears here doing good, and suffering ill, at the same time. Here is, 1. The good service he did to his king and country, in rescuing the city of Keilah out of the hands of the Philistines, ver. 1—6. 2. The danger he was thereby brought into from the malice of the prince he served and the treachery of the city he saved, and his deliverance, by divine direction, from that danger, ver. 7—13. 3. David to a wood, and his friend Jonathan visiting him there and encouraging him, ver. 14—15. 4. The information which the Ziphites brought to Saul of David's haunts, and the expedition Saul made, in pursuit of him, ver. 19—25. The narrow escape David had of falling into his hands, ver. 26—29. "Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

**T**HEN they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors. 2 Therefore David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah. 3 And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines? 4 Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go

down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand. 5 So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. 6 And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, *that* he came down with an ephod in his hand.

Now we find why the prophet Gad (by divine direction, no doubt) ordered David to go into the land of Judah, *ch. xxii. 5*. It was that, since Saul neglected the public safety, he might take care of it, notwithstanding the ill treatment that was given him; for he must render good for evil, and therein be a type of him who not only ventured his life, but laid down his life, for those that were his enemies.

I. Tidings are brought to David, as to the patron and protector of his country's liberties, that the Philistines had made a descent upon the city of Keilah and plundered the country thereabouts, *v. 1*. Probably it was the departure both of God and David from Saul that encouraged the Philistines to make this incursion. When princes begin to persecute God's people and ministers, let them expect no other than vexation on all sides. The way for any country to be quiet is to let God's church be quiet in it. If Saul fight against David, the Philistines shall fight against his country.

II. David is forward enough to come in for their relief, but is willing to enquire of the Lord concerning it. Here is an instance, 1. Of David's generosity and public-spiritedness. Though his head and hands were full of his own business, and he had enough to do, with the little force he had, to secure himself, yet he was concerned for the safety of his country and could not sit still to see that ravaged: nay, though Saul, whose business it was to guard the borders of his land, hated him and sought his life, yet he was willing, to the utmost of his power, to serve him and his interests against the common enemy, and bravely abhorred the thought of sacrificing the common welfare to his private revenge. Those are unlike to David who sullenly decline to do good because they have not been so well considered as they deserved for the services they have done. 2. Of David's piety and regard to God. He enquired of the Lord by the prophet Gad; for it should seem (by *v. 6*) that Abiathar came not to him with the ephod till he was in Keilah. His enquiry is, *Shall I go and smite these Philistines?* He enquires both concerning the duty (whether he might lawfully take Saul's work out of his hand, and act without a commission

from him) and concerning the event, whether he might safely venture against such a force as the Philistines had with such a handful of men at his feet, and such a dangerous enemy as Saul was at his back. It is our duty, and will be our ease and comfort, whatever happens, to acknowledge God in all our ways and to seek direction from him.

III. God appointed him once and again to go against the Philistines, and promised him success: *Go, and smite the Philistines, v. 2*. His men opposed it, *v. 3*. No sooner did he begin to have soldiers of his own than he found it hard enough to manage them. They objected that they had enemies enough among their own countrymen, they needed not to make the Philistines their enemies. Their hearts failed them when they only apprehended themselves in danger from Saul's band of pursuers, much more when they came to engage the Philistine-armies. To satisfy them, therefore, he *enquired of the Lord again*, and now received, not only a full commission, which would warrant him to fight though he had no orders from Saul (*Arise, go down to Keilah*), but also a full assurance of victory: *I will deliver the Philistines into thy hand, v. 4*. This was enough to animate the greatest coward he had in his regiment.

IV. He went accordingly against the Philistines, routed them, and rescued Keilah, (*v. 5*), and it should seem he made a sally into the country of the Philistines, for he carried off their cattle by way of reprisal for the wrong they did to the men of Keilah in robbing their threshing-floors. Here notice is taken (*v. 6*) that it was while David remained in Keilah, after he had cleared it of the Philistines, that Abiathar came to him with the ephod in his hand, that is, the high priest's ephod, in which the urim and thummim were. It was a great comfort to David, in his banishment, that when he could not go to the house of God he had some of the choicest treasures of that house brought to him, the high priest and his breast-plate of judgment.

7 And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars. 8 And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. 9 And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. 10 Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy

the city for my sake. 11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down. 12 Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up. 13 Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbore to go forth.

Here is, 1. Saul contriving within himself the destruction of David (v. 7, 8): *He heard that he had come to Keilah*; and did he not hear what brought him thither? Was it not told him that he had bravely relieved Keilah and delivered it out of the hands of the Philistines? This, one would think, should have put Saul upon considering what honour and dignity should be done to David for this. But, instead of that, he catches at it as an opportunity of doing David a mischief. An ungrateful wretch he was, and for ever unworthy to have any service or kindness done him. Well might David complain of his enemies that they rewarded him *evil for good*, and that for his love they were his adversaries, Ps. xxxv. 12; cix. 4. Christ was used thus basely, John x. 32. Now observe, 1. How Saul abused the *God of Israel*, in making his providence to patronise and give countenance to his malicious designs, and thence promising himself success in them: *God hath delivered him into my hand*; as if he who was rejected of God were in this instance owned and favoured by him, and David infatuated. He vainly triumphs before the victory, forgetting how often he had had fairer advantages against David than he had now and had yet missed his aim. He impiously connects God with his cause, because he thought he had gained one point. Therefore David prays (Ps. cxl. 8), *Grant not, O Lord! the desires of the wicked; further not his wicked device, lest they exalt themselves.* We must not think that one smiling providence either justifies an unrighteous cause or secures its success. 2. How Saul abused the Israel of God, in making them the servants of his malice against David. He called all the people together to war, and they must with all speed march to Keilah, pretending to oppose the Philistines, but intending to besiege David and his men, though concealing that design; for it is said (v. 9) that he *secretly practised mischief against him.* Miserable is that peo-

ple whose prince is a tyrant, for, while some are sufferers by his tyranny, others (which is worse) are made servants to it and instruments of it.

II. David consulting with God concerning his own preservation. He knew by the information brought him that Saul was plotting his ruin (v. 9) and therefore applied to his great protector for direction. No sooner is the ephod brought to him than he makes use of it: *Bring hither the ephod.* We have the scriptures, those lively oracles, in our hands; let us take advice from them in doubtful cases. "Bring hither the Bible."

1. David's address to God upon this occasion is, (1.) Very solemn and reverent. 'Twice he calls God the *Lord God of Israel*, and thrice calls himself his *servant*, v. 10, 11. Those that address God must know their distance, and who they are speaking to. (2.) Very particular and express. His representation of the case is so (v. 10): "Thy servant has certainly heard on good authority" (for he would not call for the ephod upon every idle rumour) "that Saul has a design upon Keilah;" he does not say, "to destroy me," but, "to destroy the city" (as he had lately done the city of Nob) "for my sake." He seems more solicitous for their safety than for his own, and will expose himself any where rather than they shall be brought into trouble by his being among them. Generous souls are thus minded. His queries upon the case are likewise very particular. God allows us to be so in our addresses to him: "Lord, direct me in this matter, about which I am now at a loss." He does indeed invert the due order of his queries, but God in his answer puts him into method. That question should have been put first, and was first answered, "Will Saul come down, as thy servant has heard?" "Yea," says the oracle, "he will come down; he has resolved it, is preparing for it, and will do it, unless he hear that thou hast quitted the town." "Well, but if he do come down will the men of Keilah stand by me in holding the city against him, or will they open to him the gates, and deliver me into his hand?" If he had asked the men (the magistrates or elders) of Keilah themselves what they would do in that case, they could not have told him, not knowing their own minds, nor what they should do when it came to the trial, much less which way the superior vote of their council would carry it; or they might have told him they would protect him, and yet afterwards have betrayed him; but God could tell him infallibly: "When Saul besieges their city, and demands of them that they surrender thee into his hands, how fond soever they now seem of thee, as their saviour, they will deliver thee up rather than stand the shock of Saul's fury." Note, [1.] God knows all men better than they know themselves, knows their length, their strength, what is in them, and what they will do if

they come into such and such circumstances. [2.] He therefore knows not only what *will* be, but what *would* be if it were not prevented; and therefore knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and how to render to every man according to his works.

2. David, having thus far notice given him of his danger, quitted Keilah, *v.* 13. His followers had now increased in number to 600; with these he went out, not knowing whither he went, but resolving to follow Providence and put himself under its protection. This broke Saul's measures. He thought God had delivered David into his hand, but it proved that God delivered him out of his hand, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. When *Saul heard that David had escaped from Keilah, he forbore to go forth with the body of the army, as he intended (v. 8), and resolved to take only his own guards, and go in quest of him.* Thus does God baffle the designs of his people's enemies and turn their counsels head-long.

14 And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.

15 And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. 16 And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. 17 And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. 18 And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

Here is, 1. David absconding. He abode in a wilderness, in a mountain (*v.* 14), in a wood, *v.* 15. We must here, 1. Commend his eminent virtues, his humility, modesty, fidelity to his prince, and patient attendance on the providence of his God, that he did not draw up his forces against Saul, fight him in the field, or surprise him by some stratagem or other, and so avenge his own quarrel and that of the Lord's priests upon him, and put an end to his own troubles and the calamities of the country under Saul's tyrannical government. No, he makes no such attempt; he keeps God's way, waits God's time, and is content to secure himself in woods and wildernesses, though with some it might seem a reproach to that courage for which he had been famous. But, 2. We must also lament his hard fate, that an inno-

cent man should be thus terrified and put in fear of his life, that a man of honour should be thus disgraced, a man of merit thus recompensed for his services, and a man that delighted in the service both of God and his country should be debarred from both and wrapped up in obscurity. What shall we say to this? Let it make us think the worse of this world, which often gives such bad treatment to its best men; let it reconcile even great and active men to privacy and restraint, if Providence make these their lot, for they were David's; and let it make us long for that kingdom where goodness shall for ever be in glory and holiness in honour, and the righteous shall shine as the sun, which cannot be put under a bushel.

II. Saul hunting him, as his implacable enemy. He sought him every day, so restless was his malice, *v.* 14. He sought no less than his life, so cruel was his malice, *v.* 15. As it had been from the beginning, so it was now, and will be, *he that is born after the flesh persecuteth him that is born after the spirit,* Gal. iv. 29.

III. God defending him, as his powerful protector. God delivered him not into Saul's hand, as Saul hoped (*v.* 7); and, unless God delivered him into his hand, he could not prevail against him, John xix. 11.

IV. Jonathan comforting him as his faithful and constant friend. True friends will find out means to get together. David, it is likely, appointed time and place for this interview, and Jonathan observed the appointment, though he exposed himself thereby to his father's displeasure, and, had it been discovered, it might have cost him his life. True friendship will not shrink from danger, but can easily venture, will not shrink from condescension, but can easily stoop, and exchange a palace for a wood, to serve a friend. The very sight of Jonathan was reviving to David; but, besides this, he said that to him which was very encouraging. 1. As a pious friend, he directed him to God, the foundation of his confidence and the fountain of his comfort: *He strengthened his hand in God.* David, though a strong believer, needed the help of his friends for the perfecting of what was lacking in his faith; and herein Jonathan was helpful to him, by reminding him of the promise of God, the holy oil where-with he was anointed, the presence of God with him hitherto, and the many experiences he had had of God's goodness to him. Thus he strengthened his hands for action, by encouraging his heart, not in the creature, but in God. Jonathan was not in a capacity of doing any thing to strengthen him, but he assured him God would. 2. As a self-denying friend, he took a pleasure in the prospect of David's advancement to that honour which was his own birthright, *v.* 17. "Thou shalt live to be king, and I shall think it preferment enough to be next thee, near thee, though under thee, and will never

pretend to be a rival with thee." This resignation which Jonathan made to David of his title would be a great satisfaction to him, and make his way much the more clear. This, he tells him, Saul knew very well, Jonathan having sometimes heard him say as much, whence it appears what a wicked man Saul was, to persecute one whom God favoured, and what a foolish man he was, in thinking to prevent that which God had determined and which would certainly come to pass. How could he disannul what God had purposed? 3. As a constant friend, he renewed his league of friendship with him. They made a covenant now, this third time, before the Lord, calling him to witness to it, v. 18. True love takes delight in repeating its engagements, giving and receiving fresh assurances of the firmness of the friendship. Our covenant with God should be often renewed, and therein our communion with him kept up. David and Jonathan now parted, and never came together again, that we find, in this world; for Jonathan said what he wished, not what he had ground to expect, when he promised himself that he should be next to David in his kingdom.

19 Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? 20 Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand. 21 And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the Lord; for ye have compassion on me. 22 Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly. 23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah. 24 And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. 25 Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when

Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26 And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them. 27 But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. 28 Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines; therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth. 29 And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi.

Here, 1. The Ziphites offer their service to Saul, to betray David to him, v. 19, 20. He was sheltering himself in the wilderness of Ziph (v. 14, 15), putting the more confidence in the people of that country because they were of his own tribe. They had reason to think themselves happy that they had an opportunity of serving one who was the ornament of their tribe and was likely to be much more so, who was so far from plundering the country, or giving it any disturbance with his troops, that he was ready to protect it and do them all the good offices that there was occasion for. But, to ingratiate themselves with Saul, they went to him, and not only informed him very particularly where David quartered (v. 19), but invited him to come with his forces into their country in pursuit of him, and promised to deliver him into his hand, v. 20. Saul had not sent to examine or threaten them, but of their own accord, and even without asking a reward (as Judas did—*What will you give me?*), they offered to betray David to him who, they knew, thirsted after his blood. 2. Saul thankfully receives their information, and gladly lays hold of the opportunity of hunting David in their wilderness, in hopes to make a prey of him at length. He intimates to them how kindly he took it (v. 21): *Blessed be you of the Lord* (so near is God to his mouth, though far from his heart), *for you have compassion on me*. It seems he looked upon himself as a miserable man and an object of pity; his own envy and ill-nature made him so, otherwise he might have been easy and have needed no man's compassion. He likewise insinuates the little concern that the generality of his people showed for him. "You have compassion on me, which others have not." Saul gives them instructions to search more particularly for his haunts (v. 22), "for" (says he) "I hear he deals very subtilly," representing him as a man crafty to do mischief, whereas all his subtilty was to



secure himself. It was strange that Saul did not go down with them immediately, but he hoped by their means to set his game with the more certainty, and thus divine Providence gave David time to shift for himself. But the Ziphites had laid their spies upon all the places where he was likely to be discovered, and therefore Saul might come and seize him if he was in the land, *v.* 23. Now he thought himself sure of his prey and pleased himself with the thoughts of devouring it 3. The imminent peril that David was now brought into. Upon intelligence that the Ziphites had betrayed him, he retired from the hill of Hachilah to the wilderness of Maon (*v.* 24), and at this time he penned the 54th Psalm, as appears by the title, wherein he calls the Ziphites *strangers*, though they were Israelites, because they used him barbarously; but he puts himself under the divine protection: "*Behold, God is my helper, and then all shall be well*" Saul, having got intelligence of him, pursued him closely (*v.* 25), till he came so near him that there was but a mountain between them (*v.* 26), David and his men on one side of the mountain flying and Saul and his men on the other side pursuing, David in fear and Saul in hope. But this mountain was an emblem of the divine Providence coming between David and the destroyer, like the pillar of cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians. David was concealed by this mountain and Saul confounded by it. David now flees *as a bird to his mountain* (Ps. xi. 1) and finds God to him as the shadow of a great rock. Saul hoped with his numerous forces to enclose David, and compass him in and his men; but the ground did not prove convenient for his design, and so it failed. A new name was given to the place in remembrance of this (*v.* 28): *Selah-hammalekoth—the rock of division*, because it divided between Saul and David. 4. The deliverance of David out of this danger. Providence gave Saul a diversion, when he was just ready to lay hold of David; notice was brought him that the Philistines were *invading the land* (*v.* 27), probably that part of the land where his own estate lay, which would be seized, or at least spoiled, by the invaders; for the little notice he took of Keilah's distress and David's relief of it, in the beginning of this chapter, gives us cause to suspect that he would not now have left pursuing David, and gone to oppose the Philistines, if some private interests of his own had not been at stake. However it was, he found himself under a necessity of *going against the Philistines* (*v.* 28), and by this means David was delivered when he was on the brink of destruction. Saul was disappointed of his prey, and God was glorified as David's wonderful protector. When the Philistines invaded the land they were far from intending any kindness to David by it, yet the overruling providence of God, which orders

all events and the times of them, made it very serviceable to him. The wisdom of God is never at a loss for ways and means to preserve his people. As this Saul was diverted, so another Saul was converted, just then when he was *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the saints of the Lord*, Acts ix. 1. 5. David, having thus escaped, took shelter in some natural fortresses, which he found in the wilderness of En-gedi, *v.* 29. And this Dr. Lightfoot thinks was the wilderness of Judah, in which David was when he penned Psalm lxi., which breathes as almost any of his psalms; for in all places and in all conditions he still kept up his communion with God.

## CHAP. XXIV.

We have hitherto had Saul seeking an opportunity to destroy David, and, to his shame, he could never find it. In this chapter David had a fair opportunity to destroy Saul, and, to his honour, he did not make use of it; and his sparing Saul's life was as great an instance of God's grace in him as the preserving of his own life was of God's providence over him. Observe, I. How maliciously Saul sought David's life, *ver.* 1, 2, 11. How generously David saved Saul's life (when he had him at an advantage) and only cut off the skirt of his robe, *ver.* 3—8. III. How pathetically he reasoned with Saul, upon this, to bring him to a better temper towards him, *ver.* 9—15. IV. The good impression this made upon Saul for the present, *ver.* 16—22.

AND it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi. 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. 3 And he came to the sheepecotes by the way, where *was a cave*; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. 4 And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. 5 And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. 6 And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. 7 So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on *his way*. 8 David also arose afterward, and went

out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

Here, I. Saul renews his pursuit of David, v. 1, 2. No sooner had he come home safely from chasing the Philistines, in which it should seem he had good success, than he enquired after David to do him a mischief, and resolved to have another thrust at him, *as if he had been delivered to do all these abominations*, Jer. vii. 10. By the frequent incursions of the Philistines, he might have seen how necessary it was to recal David from his banishment and restore him to his place in the army again; but so far is he from doing this that now more than ever he is exasperated against him, and, hearing that he is *in the wilderness of En-gedi*, he draws out 3000 choice men, and goes with them at his feet in pursuit of him *upon the rocks of the wild goats*, where, one would think, David should not have been envied a habitation nor Saul desirous of disturbing him; for what harm could he fear from one who was no better accommodated? But it is not enough for Saul that David is thus cooped up; he cannot be easy while he is alive.

II. Providence brings Saul alone into the same cave wherein David and his men had hidden themselves, v. 3. In those countries there were very large caves in the sides of the rocks or mountains, partly natural, but probably much enlarged by art for the sheltering of sheep from the heat of the sun; hence we read of places where the flocks did rest at noon (Cant. i. 7), and this cave seems to be spoken of as one of the sheep-cotes. In the sides of this cave David and his men remained, perhaps not all his men, the whole 600, but only some few of his particular friends, the rest being disposed of in similar retirements. Saul, passing by, turned in himself alone, not in search of David (for, supposing him to be an aspiring ambitious man, he thought to find him rather climbing with the wild goats upon the rocks than retiring with the sheep into a cave), but thither he turned aside *to cover his feet*, that is, to sleep awhile, it being a cool and quiet place, and very refreshing in the heat of the day: probably he ordered his attendants to march before, reserving only a very few to wait for him at the mouth of the cave. Some by the covering of the feet understand the easing of nature, and think that this was Saul's errand into the cave: but the former interpretation is more probable.

III. David's servants stir him up to kill Saul now that he has so fair an opportunity to do it, v. 4. They reminded him that this was the day which he had long looked for, and of which God had spoken to him in general when he was anointed to the kingdom, which should put a period to his

troubles and open the passage to his advancement. Saul now lay at his mercy, and it was easy to imagine how little mercy he would find with Saul and therefore what little reason he had to show mercy to him. "By all means" (say his servants) "give him the fatal blow now." See how apt we are to misunderstand, 1. The promises of God. God had assured David that he would deliver him from Saul, and his men interpret this as a warrant to destroy Saul. 2. The providences of God. Because it was now in his power to kill him, they concluded he might lawfully do it.

IV. David *cut off the skirt of his robe*, but soon repented that he had done this: *His heart smote him* for it (v. 5); though it did Saul no real hurt, and served David for a proof that it was in his power to have killed him (v. 11), yet, because it was an affront to Saul's royal dignity, he wished he had not done it. Note, It is a good thing to have a heart within us smiling us for sins that seem little; it is a sign that conscience is awake and tender, and will be the means of preventing greater sins.

V. He reasons strongly both with himself and with his servants against doing Saul any hurt. 1. He reasons with himself (v. 6). *The Lord forbid that I should do this thing.* Note, Sin is a thing which it becomes us to startle at, and to resist the temptations to, not only with resolution, but with a holy indignation. He considered Saul now, not as his enemy, and the only person that stood in the way of his preferment (for then he would be induced to hearken to the temptation), but as God's anointed (that is, the person whom God had appointed to reign as long as he lived, and who, as such, was under the particular protection of the divine law), and as his master, to whom he was obliged to be faithful. Let servants and subjects learn hence to be dutiful and loyal, whatever hardships are put upon them, 1 Pet. ii. 18. 2. He reasons with his servants: *He suffered them not to rise against Saul*, v. 7. He would not only not do this evil thing himself, but he would not suffer those about him to do it. Thus did he render good for evil to him from whom he had received evil for good, and was herein both a type of Christ, who saved his persecutors, and an example to all Christians not to be *overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good*.

VI. He followed Saul out of the cave, and, though he would not take the opportunity to slay him, yet he wisely took the opportunity, if possible, to slay his enmity, by convincing him that he was not such a man as he took him for. 1. Even in showing his head now he testified that he had an honourable opinion of Saul. He had too much reason to believe that, let him say what he would, Saul would immediately be the death of him as soon as he saw him, and yet he bravely lays aside that jealousy, and thinks Saul so much a

man of sense as to hear his reasoning when he had so much to say in his own vindication and such fresh and sensible proofs to give of his own integrity. 2. His behaviour was very respectful: He *stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself*, giving honour to whom honour was due, and teaching us to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our superiors, even to those that have been most injurious to us.

9 And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? 10 Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and *some bade me* kill thee: but *mine eye* spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed. 11 Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that *there is* neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. 12 The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 13 As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 14 After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. 15 The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

We have here David's warm and pathetic speech to Saul, wherein he endeavours to convince him that he did him a great deal of wrong in persecuting him thus and to persuade him therefore to be reconciled.

I. He calls him *father* (v. 11), for he was not only, as king, the father of his country, but he was, in particular, his father-in-law. From a father one may expect compassion and a favourable opinion. For a prince to seek the ruin of any of his good subjects is as unnatural as for a father to seek the ruin of his own children.

II. He lays the blame of his rage against him upon his evil counsellors: *Wherefore hearest thou men's words?* v. 9. It is a piece of respect due to crowned heads, if they do

amiss, to charge it upon those about them, who either advised them to it or should have advised them against it. David had reason enough to think that Saul persecuted him purely from his own envy and malice, yet he courteously supposes that others put him on to do it, and made him believe that David was his enemy and sought his hurt. Satan, the great accuser of the brethren, has his agents in all places, and particularly in the courts of those princes that encourage them and give ear to them, who make it their business to represent the people of God as enemies to Caesar and hurtful to kings and provinces, that, being thus dressed up in bear-skins, they may "be baited."

III. He solemnly protests his own innocence, and that he is far from designing any hurt or mischief to Saul: "*There is neither evil nor transgression in my hand*, v. 11. I am not chargeable with any crime, nor conscious of any guilt, and, had I a window in my breast, thou mightest through it see the sincerity of my heart in this protestation: *I have not sinned against thee* (however I have sinned against God), *yet thou huntest my soul*," that is, "my life." Perhaps it was about this time that David penned the seventh psalm, concerning the affair of Cush the Benjamite (that is, Saul, as some think), wherein he thus appeals to God (v. 3—5): *If there be iniquity in my hands, then let the enemy persecute my soul and take it*, putting in a parenthesis, with reference to the story of this chapter, *Yea, I have delivered him that without cause is my enemy*.

IV. He produces undeniable evidence to prove the falsehood of the suggestion upon which Saul's malice against him was grounded. David was charged with seeking Saul's hurt: "*See*," says he, "*yea, see the skirt of thy robe*, v. 11. Let this be a witness for me, and an unexceptionable witness it is; had that been true of which I am accused, I should now have had thy head in my hand and not the skirt of thy robe, for I could as easily have cut off that as this." To corroborate this evidence he shows him, 1. That God's providence had given him opportunity to do it: *The Lord delivered thee*, very surprisingly, *to day into my hand*, whence many a one would have gathered an intimation that it was the will of God he should now give the determining blow to him whose neck lay so fair for it. When Saul had but a very small advantage against David he cried out, *God has delivered him into my hand* (ch. xxiii. 7), and resolved to make the best of that advantage; but David did not so. 2. That his counsellors and those about him had earnestly besought him to do it: *Some bade me kill thee*. He had blamed Saul for hearkening to men's words and justly; "for," says he, "if I had done so, thou wouldest not have been alive now." 3. That it was upon a good principle that he refused to do it; not because Saul's attendants were at hand, who, it may

he, would have avenged his death; no, it was not by the fear of them, but by the fear of God, that he was restrained from it. "He is my lord, and the Lord's anointed, whom I ought to protect, and to whom I owe faith and allegiance, and therefore I said, I will not touch a hair of his head." Such a happy command he had of himself that his nature, in the midst of the greatest provocation, was not suffered to rebel against his principles.

V. He declares it to be his fixed resolution never to be his own avenger: "*The Lord avenge me of thee*, that is, deliver me out of thy hand; but, whatever comes of it, *my hand shall not be upon thee*" (v. 12), and again (v. 13), for *saiith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*. The wisdom of the ancients is transmitted to posterity by their proverbial sayings. Many such we receive by tradition from our fathers; and the counsels of common persons are very much directed by this, "As the old saying is." Here is one that was in use in David's time: *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*, that is, 1. Men's own iniquity will ruin them at last, so some understand it. Froward furious men will cut their own throats with their own knives. Give them rope enough, and they will hang themselves. In this sense it comes in very fitly as a reason why *his hand should not be upon him*. 2. Bad men will do bad things; according as men's principles and dispositions are, so will their actions be. This also agrees very well with the connexion. If David had been a wicked man, as he was represented, he would have done this wicked thing; but he durst not, because of the fear of God. Or thus: Whatever injuries bad men do us (which we are not to wonder at; he that lies among thorns must expect to be scratched), yet we must not return them; never render railing for railing. Though *wickedness proceed from the wicked*, yet let it not therefore proceed from us by way of retaliation. Though the dog bark at the sheep, the sheep does not bark at the dog. See Isa. xxxii. 6—8.

VI. He endeavours to convince Saul that as it was a bad thing, so it was a mean thing, for him to give chase to such an inconsiderable person as he was (v. 14): *Whom does the king of Israel pursue with all this care and force? A dead dog; a flea; one flea*, so it is in the Hebrew. It is below so great a king to enter the lists with one that is so unequal a match for him, one of his own servants, bred a poor shepherd, now an exile, neither able nor willing to make any resistance. To conquer him would not be to his honour, to attempt it was his disparagement. If Saul would consult his own reputation, he would slight such an enemy (supposing he were really his enemy) and would think himself in no danger from him. David was so far from aspiring that he was, in his own account, as a dead dog. Mephibosheth thus calls him-

self, 2 Sam. ix. 8. This humble language would have wrought upon Saul if he had had any spark of generosity in him. *Satis est prostrasse leoni—Enough for the lion that he has laid his victim low*. What credit would it be to Saul to trample upon a dead dog? What pleasure could it be to him to hunt a flea, a single flea, which (as some have observed), if it be sought, is not easily found, if it be found, is not easily caught, and, if it be caught, is a poor prize, especially for a prince. *Aquila non captat muscas—The eagle does not dart upon flies*. David thinks Saul had no more reason to fear him than to fear a flea-bite.

VII. He once and again appeals to God as the righteous Judge (v. 12 and v. 15): *The Lord judge between me and thee*. Note, The justice of God is the refuge and comfort of oppressed innocence. If men wrong us, God will right us, at furthest, in the judgment of the great day. With him David leaves his cause, and so rests satisfied, waiting his time to appear for him.

16 And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, *Is this thy voice, my son David?* And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. 17 And he said to David, *Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.* 18 And thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. 19 For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. 20 And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. 21 Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house. 22 And David swore unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold.

Here we have,

1. Saul's penitent reply to David's speech. It was strange that he had patience to hear him out, considering how outrageous he was against him, and how cutting David's discourse was. But God restrained him and

his men; and we may suppose Saul struck with amazement at the singularity of the event, and much more when he found how much he had lain at David's mercy. His heart must have been harder than a stone if this had not affected him. 1. He melted into tears, and we will not suppose them to have been counterfeit but real expressions of his present concern at the sight of his own iniquity, so plainly proved upon him. He speaks as one quite overcome with David's kindness: *Is this thy voice, my son David?* And, as one that relented at the thought of his own folly and ingratitude, he *lifted up his voice and wept*, v. 16. Many mourn for their sins that do not truly repent of them, weep bitterly for them, and yet continue in love and league with them. 2. He ingenuously acknowledges David's integrity and his own iniquity (v. 17): *Thou art more righteous than I*. Now God made good to David that word on which he had caused him to hope, that he would *bring forth his righteousness as the light*, Ps. xxxvii. 6. Those who take care to keep a good conscience may leave it to God to secure them the credit of it. This fair confession was enough to prove David innocent (even his enemy himself being judge), but not enough to prove Saul himself a true penitent. He should have said, *Thou art righteous, but I am wicked*; but the utmost he will own is this: *Thou art more righteous than I*. Bad men will commonly go no further than this in their confessions; they will own they are not so good as some others are; there are those that are better than they, and more righteous. He now owns himself under a mistake concerning David (v. 18): *"Thou hast shown this day that thou art so far from seeking my hurt that thou hast dealt well with me."* We are too apt to suspect others to be worse affected towards us than really they are, and than perhaps they are proved to be; and when, afterwards, our mistake is discovered, we should be forward to recal our suspicions, as Saul does here. 3. He prays God to recompense David for this his generous kindness to him. He owns that David's sparing him, when he had him in his power, was an uncommon and unparalleled instance of tenderness to an enemy; no man would have done the like; and therefore, either because he thought himself not able to give him a full recompence for so great a favour, or because he found himself not inclined to give him any recompence at all, he turns him over to God for his pay: *The Lord reward thee good*, v. 19. Poor beggars can do no less than pray for their benefactors, and Saul did no more. 4. He prophesies his advancement to the throne (v. 20): *I know well that thou shalt surely be king*. He knew it before, by the promise Samuel had made him of it compared with the excellent spirit that appeared in David, which highly aggravated his sin and folly in persecuting him as

he did; he had as much reason to say concerning David as David concerning him, *How can I put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed?* But now he knew it by the interest he found David had in the people, the special providence of God in protecting him, and the generous kingly spirit he had now given a proof of in sparing his enemy. Now he knew it, that is, now that he was in a good temper he was willing to own that he knew it and to submit to the conviction of it. Note, Sooner or later, God will force even those that are of the synagogue of Satan to know and own those that he has loved, and to worship before their feet; for so is the promise, Rev. iii. 9. This acknowledgment which Saul made of David's incontestable title to the crown was a great encouragement to David himself and a support to his faith and hope. 5. He binds David with an oath hereafter to show the same tenderness of his seed and of his name as he had now shewn of his person, v. 21. David had more reason to oblige Saul by an oath that he would not destroy him, yet he insists not on that (if the laws of justice and honour would not bind him, an oath would not), but Saul knew David to be a conscientious man, and would think his interests safe if he could get them secured by his oath. Saul by his disobedience had ruined his own soul, and never took care by repentance to prevent that ruin, and yet is very solicitous that his name might not be destroyed nor his seed cut off. However, *David swore unto him*, v. 22. Though he might be tempted, not only in revenge, but in prudence, to extirpate Saul's family, yet he binds himself not to do it, knowing that God could and would establish the kingdom to him and his, without the use of such bloody methods. This oath he afterwards religiously observed; he supported Mephibosheth, and executed those as traitors that slew Ishbosheth. The hanging up of seven of Saul's posterity, to atone for the destruction of the Gibeonites, was God's appointment, not David's act, and therefore not the violation of this oath.

II. Their parting in peace. 1. Saul, for the present, desisted from the persecution. He went home convinced, but not converted; ashamed of his envy of David, yet retaining in his breast that root of bitterness; vexed that, when at last he had found David, he could not at that time find in his heart to destroy him, as he had designed. God has many ways to tie the hands of persecutors, when he does not turn their hearts. 2. David continued to shift for his own safety. He knew Saul too well to trust him, and therefore *got him up into the hold*. It is dangerous venturing upon the mercy of a reconciled enemy. We read of those who believed in Christ, and yet he *did not commit himself to them because he knew all men*. Those that like David are innocent as doves must thus like him be *wise as serpents*.

## CHAP. XXV.

We have here some intermission of David's troubles by Saul. Providence favoured him with a breathing time, and yet this chapter gives us instances of the troubles of David. If one vacation seem to be over, we must not be secure; a storm may arise from some other point, as here to David. 1. Tidings of the death of Samuel could not but trouble him, ver. 1. But, II. The abuse he received from Nabal is more largely recorded in this chapter. 1. The character of Nabal, ver. 2, 3. 2. The humble request sent to him, ver. 4-9. 3. His churlish answer, ver. 10-12. 4. David's angry resentment of it, ver. 13, 21, 22. 5. Abigail's prudent care to prevent the mischief it was likely to bring upon her family, ver. 14-20. 6. Her address to David to pacify him, ver. 23-31. 7. David's favourable reception of her, ver. 32-35. 8. The death of Nabal, ver. 36-38. 9. Abigail's marriage to David, ver. 39-44.

AND Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

We have here a short account of Samuel's death and burial. 1. Though he was a great man, and one that was admirably well qualified for public service, yet he spent the latter end of his days in retirement and obscurity, not because he was superannuated (for he knew how to preside in a college of the prophets, *ch.* xix. 20), but because Israel had rejected him, for which God thus justly chastised them, and because his desire was to be quiet and to enjoy himself and his God in the exercises of devotion now in his advanced years, and in this desire God graciously indulged him. Let old people be willing to rest themselves, though it look like burying themselves alive. 2. Though he was a firm friend to David, for which Saul hated him, as also for dealing plainly with him, yet he died in peace even in the worst of the days of the tyranny of Saul, who, he sometimes feared, would kill him, *ch.* xvi. 2. Though Saul loved him not, yet he feared him, as Herod did John, and feared the people, for all knew him to be a prophet. Thus is Saul restrained from hurting him. 3. All Israel lamented him; and they had reason, for they had all a loss in him. His personal merits commanded this honour to be done him at his death. His former services to the public, when he judged Israel, made this respect to his name and memory a just debt; it would have been very ungrateful to have withheld it. The sons of the prophets had lost the founder and president of their college, and whatever weakened them was a public loss. But that was not all: Samuel was a constant intercessor for Israel, prayed daily for them, *ch.* xii. 23. If he go, they part with the best friend they have. The loss is the more grievous at this juncture when Saul has grown so outrageous and David is driven from his country; never more need of Samuel than now, yet now he is removed. We will hope that the Israelites lamented Samuel's death the more bitterly because they remembered against themselves their own sin and folly in rejecting him and desiring a king. Note, (1.) Those have hard hearts who can bury their faithful ministers with

dry eyes, who are not sensible of the loss of those who have prayed for them and taught them the way of the Lord. (2.) When God's providence removes our relations and friends from us we ought to be humbled for our misconduct towards them while they were with us. 4. They buried him, not in the school of the prophets at Naioth, but in his own house (or perhaps in the garden pertaining to it) at Ramah, where he was born. 5. David, hereupon, went down to the wilderness of Paran, retiring perhaps to mourn the more solemnly for the death of Samuel. Or, rather, because now that he had lost so good a friend, who was (and he hoped would be) a great support to him, he apprehended his danger to be greater than ever, and therefore withdrew to a wilderness, out of the limits of the land of Israel; and now it was that he *dwelt in the tents of Kedar*, Ps. cxx. 5. In some parts of this wilderness of Paran Israel wandered when they came out of Egypt. The place would bring to mind God's care concerning them, and David might improve that for his own encouragement, now in his wilderness-state.

2 And *there was* a man in Maon, whose possessions *were* in Carmel; and the man *was* very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 Now the name of the man *was* Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and *she was* a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man *was* churlish and evil in his doings; and he *was* of the house of Caleb. 4 And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. 5 And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: 6 And thus shall ye say to him that liveth *in prosperity*, Peace *be* both to thee, and peace *be* to thine house, and peace *be* unto all that thou hast. 7 And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there aught missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. 8 Ask thy young men, and they will show thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy ser-

vants, and to thy son David. 9 And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased. 10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

Here begins the story of Nabal.

1. A short account of him, who and what he was (v. 2, 3), a man we should never have heard of if there had not happened some communication between him and David. Observe, 1. His name: *Nabal—a fool*; so it signifies. It was a wonder that his parents would give him that name and an ill omen of what proved to be his character. Yet indeed we all of us deserve to be so called when we come into the world, for *man is born like the wild ass's colt and foolishness is bound up in our hearts*. 2. His family: He was of the house of Caleb, but was indeed of another spirit. He inherited Caleb's estate; for Maon and Carmel lay near Hebron, which was given to Caleb (Josh. xv. 54, 55; xiv. 14), but he was far from inheriting his virtues. He was a disgrace to his family, and then it was no honour to him. *Degenerant genus opprobrium—A good extraction is a reproach to him who degenerates from it*. The LXX., and some other ancient versions, read it appellatively, not, He was a Calebite, but, He was a dogged man, of a currish disposition, surly and snappish, and always snarling. He was *ἔνθρωπος κυνικός—a man that was a cynic*. 3. His wealth: He was very great, that is, very rich (for riches make men look great in the eye of the world), otherwise, to one that takes his measures aright, he really looked very mean. Riches are common blessings, which God often gives to Nabals, to whom he gives neither wisdom nor grace. 4. His wife—Abigail, a woman of great understanding. Her name signifies, *the joy of her father*; yet he could not promise himself much joy of her when he married her to such a husband, enquiring more after his wealth than after his wisdom. Many a child is thrown away upon a great heap of the dirt of worldly wealth, married to that, and to nothing else that is desirable. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, but an inheritance is good for little without wisdom. Many an Abigail is tied to a Nabal; and if it be so, be her understanding, like Abigail's, ever so great, it will be little enough for her exercises. 5. His character. He had no sense

either of honour or honesty; not of honour, for he was churlish, cross, and ill-humoured; not of honesty, for he was evil in his doings, hard and oppressive, and a man that cared not what fraud and violence he used in getting and saving, so he could but get and save. This is the character given of Nabal by him who knows what every man is.

II. David's humble request to him, that he would send him some victuals for himself and his men.

1. David, it seems, was in such distress that he would be glad to be beholden to him, and did in effect come a begging to his door. What little reason have we to value the wealth of this world when so great a churl as Nabal abounds and so great a saint as David suffers want! Once before we had David begging his bread, but then it was of Ahimelech the high priest, to whom one would not grudge to stoop. But to send a begging to Nabal was what such a spirit as David had could not admit without some reluctance; yet, if Providence bring him to these straits, he will not say that to beg he is ashamed. Yet see Ps. xxxvii. 25.

2. He chose a good time to send to Nabal, when he had many hands employed about him in shearing his sheep, for whom he was to make a plentiful entertainment, so that good cheer was stirring. Had he sent at another time, Nabal would have pretended he had nothing to spare, but now he could not have that excuse. It was usual to make feasts at their sheep-shearings, as appears by Absalom's feast on that occasion (2 Sam. xiii. 24), for wool was one of the staple commodities of Canaan.

3. David ordered his men to deliver their message to him with a great deal of courtesy and respect: "*Go to Nabal, and greet him in my name*. Tell him I sent you to present my service to him, and to enquire how he does and his family," v. 5. He puts words in their mouths (v. 6): *Thus shall you say to him that liveth*; our translators add, *in prosperity*, as if those live indeed that live as Nabal did, with abundance of the wealth of this world about them; whereas, in truth, those that *live in pleasure are dead while they live*, 1 Tim. v. 6. This was, methinks too high a compliment to pass upon Nabal, to call him *the man that liveth*. David knew better things, that in God's favour is life, not in the world's smiles; and by the rough answer he was well enough served, for this too smooth address to such a muck-worm. Yet his good wishes were very commendable. "*Peace be to thee*, all good both to soul and body. *Peace be to thy house and to all that thou hast*." Tell him I am a hearty well-wisher to his health and prosperity. He bids them call him his *son David* (v. 8), intimating that, for his age and estate, David honoured him as a father, and therefore hoped to receive some fatherly kindness from him.

4. He pleaded the kindness which Nabal's shepherds had received from David and his men; and one good turn requires another. He appeals to Nabal's own servants, and shows that when David's soldiers were quartered among Nabal's shepherds, (1.) They did not hurt them themselves, did them no injury, gave them no disturbance, were not a terror to them, nor took any of the lambs out of the flock. Yet, considering the character of David's men, men in distress, and debt, and discontented, and the scarcity of provisions in his camp, it was not without a great deal of care and good management that they were kept from plundering. (2.) They protected them from being hurt by others. David himself does but intimate this, for he would not boast of his good offices: *Neither was there ought missing to them, v. 7.* But Nabal's servants, to whom he appealed, went further (v. 16): *They were a wall unto us, both by night and day.* David's soldiers were a guard to Nabal's shepherds when the bands of the Philistines robbed the threshing-floors (ch. xxiii. 1) and would have robbed the sheepfolds. From those plunderers Nabal's flocks were protected by David's care, and therefore he says, *Let us find favour in thy eyes.* Those that have shown kindness may justly expect to receive kindness.

5. He was very modest in his request. Though David was anointed king, he insisted not upon royal dainties, but, "Give whatsoever comes to thy hand, and we will be thankful for it." Beggars must not be choosers. Those that deserved to have been served first will now be glad of what is left. They plead, *We come in a good day*, a festival, when not only the provision is more plentiful, but the heart and hand are usually more open and free than at other times, when much may be spared and yet not be missed. David demands not what he wanted as a debt, either by way of tribute as he was a king, or by way of contribution as he was a general, but asks it as a boon to a friend, that was his humble servant. David's servants delivered their message faithfully and very handsomely, not doubting but to go back well laden with provisions.

III. Nabal's churlish answer to this modest petition, v. 10, 11. One could not have imagined it possible that any man should be so very rude and ill-conditioned as Nabal was. David called himself his son, and asked bread and a fish, but, instead thereof, Nabal gave him a stone and a scorpion; not only denied him, but abused him. If he had not thought fit to send him any supplies for fear of Ahimelech's fate, who paid dearly for his kindness to David; yet he might have given a civil answer, and made the denial as modest as the request was. But, instead of that, he falls into a passion, as covetous men are apt to do when they are asked for any thing, thinking thus

to cover one sin with another, and by abusing the poor to excuse themselves from relieving them. But God will not thus be mocked.

1. He speaks scornfully of David as an insignificant man, not worth taking notice of. The Philistines could say of him, *This is David the king of the land, that slew his ten thousands* (ch. xxi. 11), yet Nabal his near neighbour, and one of the same tribe, affects not to know him, or not to know him to be a man of any merit or distinction: *Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?* He could not be ignorant how much the country was obliged to David for his public services, but his narrow soul thinks not of paying any part of that debt, nor so much as of acknowledging it; he speaks of David as an inconsiderable man, obscure, and not to be regarded. Think it not strange if great men and great merits be thus disgraced. 2. He upbraids him with his present distress, and takes occasion from it to represent him as a bad man, that was fitter to be set in the stocks for a vagrant than to have any kindness shown him. How naturally does he speak the churlish clownish language of those that hate to give alms! *There are many servants now-a-days* (as if there had been none such in former days) *that break every man from his master*, suggesting that David was one of them himself ("He might have kept his place with his master Saul, and then he needed not have sent to me for provisions"), and also that he entertained and harboured those that were fugitives like himself. It would make one's blood rise to hear so great and good a man as David thus vilified and reproached by such a base churl as Nabal. *But the vile person will speak villany*, Isa. xxxii. 5-7. If men bring themselves into straits by their own folly, yet they are to be pitied and helped, and not trampled upon and starved. But David was reduced to this distress, not by any fault, no, nor any indiscretion, of his own, but purely by the good services he had done to his country and the honours which his God had put upon him; and yet he was represented as a fugitive and runagate. Let this help us to bear such reproaches and misrepresentations of us with patience and cheerfulness, and make us easy under them, that it has often been the lot of the excellent ones of the earth. Some of the best men that ever the world was blest with were counted as the *off-scouring of all things*, 1 Cor. iv. 13.

3. He insists much upon the property he had in the provisions of his table, and will by no means admit any body to share in them. "It is my bread and my flesh, yes, and my water too (though *usus communis aquarum—water is every one's property*), and it is prepared for my shearers," priding himself in it that it was all his own; and who denied it? Who offered to dispute his title? But this, he thinks, will justify him in keeping it all to himself, and giving David none;



for may he not do what he will with his own? Whereas we mistake if we think we are absolute lords of what we have and may do what we please with it. No, we are but stewards, and must use it as we are directed, remembering it is not our own, but his that entrusted us with it. Riches are *τα ἀλλότρια* (Luke xvi. 12); they are *another's*, and we ought not to talk too much of their being our own.

12 So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings. 13 And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff. 14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. 15 But the men *were* very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: 16 They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he *is such* a son of Belial, that *a man* cannot speak to him.

Here is, I. The report made to David of the abuse Nabal had given to his messengers (v. 12): *They turned their way*. They showed their displeasure, as became them to do, by breaking off abruptly from such a churl, but prudently governed themselves so well as not to render railing for railing, not to call him as he deserved, much less to take by force what ought of right to have been given them, but came and told David that he might do as he thought fit. Christ's servants, when they are thus abused, must leave it to him to plead his own cause and wait till he appear in it. The servant showed his lord what affronts he had received, but did not return them, Luke xiv. 21.

II. David's hasty resolution hereupon. He girded on his sword, and ordered his men to do so too, to the number of 400, v. 13. And what he said we are told, v. 21, 22. 1. He repented of the kindness he had done to Nabal, and looked upon it as thrown

away upon him. He said, "*Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness*. I thought to oblige him and make him my friend, but I see it is to no purpose. He has no sense of gratitude, nor is he capable of receiving the impressions of a good turn, else he could not have used me thus. He hath *requited me evil for good*." But, when we are thus requited, we should not repent of the good we have done, nor be backward to do good another time. God is kind to the evil and unthankful, and why may not we? 2. He determined to destroy Nabal and all that belonged to him, v. 22. Here David did not act like himself. His resolution was bloody, to cut off all the males of Nabal's house, and spare none, man nor man-child. The ratification of his resolution was passionate: *So, and more also do God* (he was going to say *to me*, but that would better become Saul's mouth (ch. xiv. 44) than David's, and therefore he decently turns it off) *to the enemies of David*. *Is this thy voice, O David?* Can the man after God's own heart speak thus unadvisedly with his lips? Has he been so long in the school of affliction, where he should have learned patience, and yet so passionate? Is this he who used to be dumb and deaf when he was reproached (Ps. xxxviii. 13), who but the other day spared him who sought his life, and yet now will not spare any thing that belongs to him who has only put an affront upon his messengers? He who at other times used to be calm and considerate is now put into such a heat by a few hard words that nothing will atone for them but the blood of a whole family. Lord, what is man! What are the best of men, when God leaves them to themselves, to try them, that they may know what is in their hearts? From Saul David expected injuries, and against those he was prepared and stood upon his guard, and so kept his temper; but from Nabal he expected kindness, and therefore the affront he gave him was a surprise to him, found him off his guard, and, by a sudden and unexpected attack, put him for the present into disorder. What need have we to pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation!*

III. The account given of this matter to Abigail by one of the servants, who was more considerate than the rest, v. 14. Had this servant spoken to Nabal, and shown him the danger he had exposed himself to by his own rudeness, he would have said, "Servants are now-a-days so saucy, and so apt to prescribe, that there is no enduring them," and, it may be, would have turned him out of doors. But Abigail, being a woman of good understanding, took cognizance of the matter, even from her servant, who, 1. Did David justice in commending him and his men for their civility to Nabal's shepherds, v. 15, 16. "The men were very good to us, and, though they were them-

selves exposed, yet they protected us and were a wall unto us." Those who do that which is good shall, one way or other, have the praise of the same. Nabal's own servant will be a witness for David that he is a man of honour and conscience, whatever Nabal himself says of him. And, 2. He did Nabal no wrong in condemning him for his rudeness to David's messengers: *He railed on them* (v. 14), *he flew upon them* (so the word is) with an intolerable rage; "for," say they, "it is his usual practice, v. 17. He is such a son of Belial, so very morose and intractable, that a man cannot speak to him but he flies into a passion immediately." Abigail knew it too well herself. 3. He did Abigail and the whole family a kindness in making her sensible what was likely to be the consequence. He knew David so well that he had reason to think he would highly resent the affront, and perhaps had had information of David's orders to his men to march that way; for he is very positive *evil is determined against our master, and all his household*, himself among the rest, would be involved in it. Therefore he desires his mistress to consider what was to be done for their common safety. They could not resist the force David would bring down upon them, nor had they time to send to Saul to protect them; something therefore must be done to pacify David.

18 Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid *them* on asses. 19 And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal. 20 And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her; and she met them. 21 Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this *fellow* hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that *pertained* unto him: and he hath requited me evil for good. 22 So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that *pertain* to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. 23 And when Abigail saw David, she hastened, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, 24 And

fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, *upon me let this iniquity be*: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. 25 Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, *even* Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. 26 Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to *shed* blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. 27 And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. 28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the batties of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee *all* thy days. 29 Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. 30 And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; 31 That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.

We have here an account of Abigail's prudent management for the preserving of her husband and family from the destruction that was just coming upon them; and we find that she did her part admirably well and fully answered her character. The passion of fools often makes those breaches in a little time which the wise, with all their wisdom, have much ado to make up again. It is hard to say whether Abigail was more

miserable in such a husband or Nabal happy in such a wife. A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, to protect as well as adorn, and will do him good and not evil. Wisdom in such a case as this was better than weapons of war. 1. It was her wisdom that what she did she did quickly, and without delay; she made haste, v. 18. It was no time to trifle or linger when all was in danger. Those that desire conditions of peace must send when the enemy is yet a great way off, Luke xiv. 32. 2. It was her wisdom that what she did she did herself, because, being a woman of great prudence and very happy address, she knew better how to manage it than any servant she had. The virtuous woman will herself look well to the ways of her household, and not devolve this duty wholly upon others.

Abigail must endeavour to atone for Nabal's faults. Now he had been in two ways rude to David's messengers, and in them to David: He had denied them the provisions they asked for, and he had given them very provoking language. Now,

I. By a most generous present, Abigail atones for his denial of their request. If Nabal had given them what came next to hand, they would have gone away thankful: but Abigail prepares the very best the house afforded and abundance of it (v. 18), according to the usual entertainments of those times, not only bread and flesh, but raisins and figs, which were their dried sweet-meats. Nabal grudged them water, but she took two bottles (casks or rundlets) of wine, loaded her asses with these provisions, and sent them before; for a gift pacifieth anger, Prov. xxi. 14. Jacob thus pacified Esau. When the instruments of the churl are evil, the liberal devises liberal things, and loses nothing by it; for by liberal things shall he stand, Isa. xxxii. 7, 8. Abigail not only lawfully, but laudably, disposed of all these goods of her husband's without his knowledge (even when she had reason to think that if he had known what she did he would not have consented to it), because it was not to gratify her own pride or vanity, but for the necessary defence of him and his family, which otherwise would have been inevitably ruined. Husbands and wives, for their common good and benefit, have a joint-interest in their worldly possessions; but if either waste, or unduly spend in any way, it is a robbing of the other.

II. By a most obliging demeanour, and charming speech, she atones for the abusive language which Nabal had given them. She met David upon the march, big with resentment, and meditating the destruction of Nabal (v. 20); but with all possible expressions of complaisance and respect she humbly begs his favour, and solicits him to pass by the offence. Her demeanour was very submissive: She bowed herself to the ground before David (v. 23) and fell at his feet, v. 24. Yielding pacifies great offences. She put herself into the place and posture

of a penitent and of a petitioner, and was not ashamed to do it, when it was for the good of her house, in the sight both of her own servants and of David's soldiers. She humbly begs of David that he will give her the hearing: *Let thy handmaid speak in thy audience.* But she needed not thus to bespeak his attention and patience; what she said was sufficient to command it, for certainly nothing could be more fine nor more moving. No topic of argument is left untouched; every thing is well placed and well expressed, most pertinently and pathetically urged, and improved to the best advantage, with such a force of natural rhetoric as cannot easily be paralleled.

1. She speaks to him all along with the deference and respect due to so great and good a man, calls him *My lord*, over and over, to expiate her husband's crime in saying, "Who is David?" She does not upbraid him with the heat of his passion, though he deserved to be reproved for it; nor does she tell him how ill it became his character; but endeavours to soften him and bring him to a better temper, not doubting but that then his own conscience would upbraid him with it.

2. She takes the blame of the ill-treatment of his messengers upon herself: "*Upon me, my lord, upon me, let this iniquity be,* v. 24. If thou wilt be angry, be angry with me, rather than with my poor husband, and look upon it as *the trespass of thy handmaid,*" v. 28. Sordid spirits care not how much others suffer for their faults, while generous spirits can be content to suffer for the faults of others. Abigail here discovered the sincerity and strength of her conjugal affection and concern for her family: whatever Nabal was, he was her husband.

3. She excuses her husband's fault by imputing it to his natural weakness and want of understanding (v. 25): "*Let not my lord take notice of his rudeness and ill manners, for it is like him; it is not the first time that he has behaved so churlishly; he must be borne with, for it is for want of wit: Nabal is his name*" (which signifies a fool), "*and folly is with him.* It was owing to his folly, not his malice. He is simple, but not spiteful. Forgive him, for he knows not what he does." What she said was too true, and she said it to excuse his fault and prevent his ruin, else she would not have done well to give such a bad character as this of her own husband, whom she ought to make the best of, and not to speak ill of.

4. She pleads her own ignorance of the matter: "*I saw not the young men,* else they should have had a better answer, and should not have gone without their errand," intimating hereby that though her husband was foolish, and unfit to manage his affairs himself, yet he had so much wisdom as to be ruled by her and take her advice.

5. She takes it for granted that she has gained her point already, perhaps perceiving.

by David's countenance, that he began to change his mind (v. 26): *Seeing the Lord hath withholden thee.* She depends not upon her own reasonings, but God's grace, to mollify him, and doubts not but that grace would work powerfully upon him; and then, "*Let all thy enemies be as Nabal, that is, if thou forbear to avenge thyself, no doubt God will avenge thee on him, as he will on all thy other enemies.*" Or it intimates that it was *below* him to take vengeance on so weak and impotent an enemy as Nabal was, who, as he would do him no kindness, so he could do him no hurt, for he needed to wish no more concerning his enemies than that they might be as unable to resist him as Nabal was. Perhaps she refers to his sparing Saul, when, but the other day, he had him at his mercy. "*Didst thou forbear to avenge thyself on that lion that would devour thee, and wilt thou shed the blood of this dog that can but bark at thee?*" The very mentioning of what he was about to do, to shed blood and to avenge himself, was enough to work upon such a tender gracious spirit as David had; and it should seem, by his reply (v. 33), that it affected him.

6. She makes a tender of the present she had brought, but speaks of it as unworthy of David's acceptance, and therefore desires it may be given to the *young men that followed him* (v. 27), and particularly to those ten that were his messengers to Nabal, and whom he had treated so rudely.

7. She applauds David for the good services he had done against the common enemies of his country, the glory of which great achievements, she hoped, he would not stain by any personal revenge: "*My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord against the Philistines, and therefore he will leave it to God to fight his battles against those that affront him, v. 28. Evil has not been found in thee all thy days.* Thou never yet didst wrong to any of thy countrymen (though persecuted as a traitor), and therefore thou wilt not begin now, nor do a thing which Saul will improve for the justifying of his malice against thee."

8. She foretels the glorious issue of his present troubles. "*It is true a man pursues thee and seeks thy life*" (she names not Saul, out of respect to his present character as king), "*but thou needest not look with so sharp and jealous an eye upon every one that affronts thee;*" for all these storms that now rattle thee will be blown over shortly. She speaks it with assurance, (1.) That God would keep him safe: *The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God,* that is, God shall hold thy soul in life (as the expression is, Ps. lxxvi. 9) as we hold those things which are bundled up or which are precious to us, Ps. cxvi. 15. *Thy soul shall be treasured up in the treasure of lives* (so the Chaldee), under lock and key as our treasure is. "*Thou shalt abide under the*

special protection of the divine providence." *The bundle of life is with the Lord our God, for in his hand our breath is, and our times Those are safe, and may be easy, that have him for their protector.* The Jews understand this not only of the *life that now is* but of that *which is to come*, even the happiness of separate souls, and therefore use it commonly as an inscription on their grave-stones. "*Here we have laid the body, but trust that the soul is bound up in the bundle of life, with the Lord our God.*" There it is safe, while the dust of the body is scattered. (2.) That God would make him victorious over his enemies. Their souls he shall *sling out*, v. 29. The stone is bound up in the sling, but it is in order to be thrown out again; so the souls of the godly shall be bundled as corn for the barn, but the souls of the wicked as tares for the fire. (3.) That God would settle him in wealth and power: "*The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, and no enemy thou hast can hinder it; therefore forgive this trespass,*" that is, "*show mercy, as thou hopest to find mercy God will make thee great, and it is the glory of great men to pass by offences.*"

9. She desires him to consider how much more comfortable it would be to him in the reflection to have forgiven this affront than to have revenged it, v. 30, 31. She reserves this argument for the last, as a very powerful one with so good a man, that the less he indulged his passion the more he consulted his peace and the repose of his own conscience, which every wise man will be tender of. (1.) She cannot but think that if he should avenge himself it would afterwards be a grief and an offence of heart to him. Many have done that in a heat which they have a thousand times wished undone again. The sweetness of revenge is soon turned into bitterness. (2.) She is confident that if he pass by the offence it will afterwards be no grief to him; but, on the contrary, it would yield him unspeakable satisfaction that his wisdom and grace had got the better of his passion. Note, When we are tempted to sin we should consider how it will appear in the reflection. Let us never do any thing for which our own consciences will afterwards have occasion to upbraid us, and which we shall look back upon with regret. *My heart shall not reproach me.*

10. She recommends herself to his favour. *When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thy handmaid,* as one that kept thee from doing that which would have disgraced thy honour, disquieted thy conscience, and made a blot in thy history. We have reason to remember those with respect and gratitude who have been instrumental to keep us from sin.

32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me.

33 And blessed *be* thy advice, and blessed *be* thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to *shed* blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. 34 For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. 35 So David received of her hand *that* which she had brought him and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.

*As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovor upon an obedient ear, Prov. xxv. 12.* Abigail was a wise reprovor of David's passion, and he gave an obedient ear to the reproof, according to his own principle (Ps. cxli. 5): *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.* Never was such an admonition either better given or better taken.

I. David gives God thanks for sending him this happy check to a sinful way (v. 32): *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me.* Note, 1. God is to be acknowledged in all the kindnesses that our friends do us either for soul or body. Whoever meet us with counsel, direction, comfort, caution, or reasonable reproof, we must see God sending them. 2. We ought to be very thankful for those happy providences which are means of preventing sin.

II. He gives Abigail thanks for interposing so opportunely between him and the mischief he was about to do: *Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, v. 33.* Most people think it enough if they take a reproof patiently, but we meet with few that will take it thankfully and will commend those that give it to them and accept it as a favour. Abigail did not rejoice more that she had been instrumental to save her husband and family from death than David did that Abigail had been instrumental to save him and his men from sin.

III. He seems very apprehensive of the great danger he was in, which magnified the mercy of his deliverance. 1. He speaks of the sin as very great. He was coming to shed blood, a sin of which when in his right mind he had a great horror, witness his prayer, *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness.* He was coming to *avenge himself with his own hand*, and that would be stepping into the throne of God, who has said, *Vengeance is mine; I will repay.* The more heinous any sin is the greater mercy it is to be kept from it. He seems to aggravate the evil of his design with this, that it would have been an

injury to so wise and good a woman as Abigail: God has *kept me back from hurting thee, v. 34.* Or perhaps, at the first sight of Abigail, he was conscious of a thought to do her a mischief for offering to oppose him, and therefore reckons it a great mercy that God gave him patience to hear her speak. 2. He speaks of the danger of his falling into it as very imminent: *"Except thou hadst hastened, the bloody execution had been done."* The nearer we were to the commission of sin the greater was the mercy of a seasonable restraint—*Almost gone* (Ps. lxxiii. 2) and yet upheld.

IV. He dismissed her with an answer of peace, v. 35. He does, in effect, own himself overcome by her eloquence: *"I have hearkened to thy voice, and will not prosecute the intended revenge, for I have accepted thy person, am well pleased with thee and what thou hast said."* Note, 1. Wise and good men will hear reason, and let that rule them, though it come from those that are every way their inferiors, and though their passions are up and their spirits provoked. 2. Oaths cannot bind us to that which is sinful. David had solemnly vowed the death of Nabal. He did evil to make such a vow, but he would have done worse if he had performed it. 3. A wise and faithful reproof is often better taken, and speeds better, than we expected, such is the hold God has of men's consciences. See Prov. xxviii. 23.

36 And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart *was* merry within him, for he *was* very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. 37 But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became *as* a stone. 38 And it came to pass about ten days *after*, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died. 39 And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed *be* the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife. 40 And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to

wife. 41 And she arose, and bowed herself on *her* face to the earth, and said, Behold, *let* thine handmaid *be* a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord. 42 And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of her's that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife. 43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel: and they were also both of them his wives. 44 But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim.

We are now to attend Nabal's funeral and Abigail's wedding.

1. Nabal's funeral. The apostle speaks of some that were *twice dead*, Jude 12. We have here Nabal *thrice* dead, though but just now wonderfully rescued from the sword of David and delivered from so great a death; for the preservations of wicked men are but reservations for some further sorer strokes of divine wrath. Here is,

1. *Nabal dead drunk*, v. 36. Abigail came home, and, it should seem, he had so many people and so much plenty about him that he neither missed her nor the provisions she took to David; but she found him in the midst of his jollity, little thinking how near he was to ruin by one whom he had foolishly made his enemy. Sinners are often most secure when they are most in danger and destruction is at the door. Observe, (1.) How extravagant he was in the entertainment of his company: *He held a feast like the feast of a king*, so magnificent and abundant, though his guests were but his sheep-shearers. This abundance might have been allowed if he had considered what God gave him his estate for, not to look great with, but to do good with. It is very common for those that are most niggardly in any act of piety or charity to be most profuse in gratifying a vain humour or a base lust. A mite is grudged to God and his poor; but, to make a *fair show in the flesh, gold is lavished out of the bag*. If Nabal had not answered to his name, he would never have been thus secure and jovial, till he had enquired whether he was safe from David's resentments; but (as bishop Hall observes) thus foolish are carnal men, that give themselves over to their pleasures before they have taken any care to make their peace with God. (2.) How sottish he was in the indulgence of his own brutish appetite: *He was very drunk*, a sign he was *Nabal, a fool*, that could not use his plenty without abusing it, could not be pleasant with his friends without making a beast of himself. There is not a surer sign that a man has but little wisdom, nor a surer

way to ruin the little he has, than drinking to excess. Nabal, that never thought he could bestow too little in charity, never thought he could bestow too much in luxury. Abigail, finding him in this condition (and probably those about him little better, when the master of the feast set them so bad an example), had enough to do to set the disordered house to-rights a little, but told Nabal nothing of what she had done with reference to David, nothing of his folly in provoking David, of his danger or of his deliverance, for, being drunk, he was as incapable to hear reason as he was to speak it. To give good advice to those that are in drink is to *cast pearls before swine*; it is better to stay till they are sober.

2. Nabal again dead with melancholy, v. 37. Next morning, when he had come to himself a little, his wife told him how near to destruction he had brought himself and his family by his own rudeness, and with what difficulty she had interposed to prevent it; and, upon this, *his heart died within him and he became as a stone*. Some suggest that the expense of the satisfaction made to David, by the present Abigail brought him, broke his heart: it seems rather that the apprehension he now had of the danger he had narrowly escaped put him into a consternation, and seized his spirits so that he could not recover it. He grew sullen, and said little, ashamed of his own folly, put out of countenance by his wife's wisdom. How is he changed! His heart over-night merry with wine, next morning heavy as a stone; so deceitful are carnal pleasures, so transient the laughter of the fool. *The end of that mirth is heaviness*. Drunkards are sometimes sad when they reflect upon their own folly. Joy in God makes the heart always light. Abigail could never, by her wise reasonings, bring Nabal to repentance; but now, by her faithful reproof, she brings him to despair.

3. Nabal, at last, dead indeed: *About ten days after*, when he had been kept so long under this pressure and pain, *the Lord smote him that he died* (v. 38), and, it should seem, he never held up his head; it is just with God (says bishop Hall) that those who live without grace should die without comfort, nor can we expect better while we go on in our sins. Here is no lamentation made for Nabal. He departed without being lamented. Every one wished that the country might never sustain a greater loss. *David*, when he heard the news of his death, *gave God thanks* for it, v. 39. He blessed God, (1.) That he had kept him from killing him: *Blessed be the Lord, who hath kept his servant from evil*. He rejoices that Nabal died a natural death and not by his hand. We should take all occasions to mention and magnify God's goodness to us in keeping us from sin. (2.) That he had taken the work into his own hands, and had vindicated David's honour, and not suffered him to go unpunished who

had been abusive to him; hereby his interest would be confirmed, and all would stand in awe of him, as one for whom God fought. (3.) That he had thereby encouraged him and all others to commit their cause to God, when they are in any way injured, with an assurance that, in his own time, he will redress their wrongs if they sit still and leave the matter to him.

II. Abigail's wedding. David was so charmed with the beauty of her person, and the uncommon prudence of her conduct and address, that, as soon as was convenient, after he heard she was a widow, he informed her of his attachment to her (v. 39), not doubting but that she who approved herself so good a wife to so bad a husband as Nabal would much more make a good wife to him, and having taken notice of her respect to him and her confidence of his coming to the throne. 1. He courted by proxy, his affairs, perhaps, not permitting him to come himself. 2. She received the address with great modesty and humility (v. 41), reckoning herself unworthy of the honour, yet having such a respect for him that she would gladly be one of the poorest servants in his family, to wash the feet of the other servants. None so fit to be preferred as those that can thus humble themselves. 3. She agreed to the proposal, went with his messengers, took a retinue with her agreeable to her quality, and she became his wife, c. 42. She did not upbraid him with his present distresses, and ask him how he could maintain her, but valued him, (1.) Because she knew he was a very good man. (2.) Because she believed he would, in due time, be a very great man. She married him in faith, not questioning but that, though now he had not a house of his own that he durst bring her to, yet God's promise to him would at length be fulfilled. Thus those who join themselves to Christ must be willing now to suffer with him, believing that hereafter they shall reign with him.

Lastly, On this occasion we have some account of David's wives. 1. One that he had lost before he married Abigail, Michal, Saul's daughter, his first, and the wife of his youth, to whom he would have been constant if she would have been so to him, but Saul had given her to another (v. 44), in token of his displeasure against him and disclaiming the relation of a father-in-law to him. 2. Another that he married besides Abigail (v. 43), and, as should seem, before her, for she is named first, ch. xxvii. 3. David was carried away by the corrupt custom of those times; but from the beginning it was not so, nor is it so now that Messiah has come, and the times of reformation, Matt. xix. 4, 5. Perhaps Saul's defrauding David of his only rightful wife was the occasion of his running into this irregularity; for, when the knot of conjugal affection is once loosed, it is scarcely ever tied fast again. When David could not

keep his first wife he thought that would excuse him if he did not keep to his second. But we deceive ourselves if we think to make others' faults a cloak for our own.

## CHAP. XXVI.

David's troubles from Saul here begin again; and the clouds return after the rain, when one would have hoped the storm had blown over, and the sky had cleared upon that side; but after Saul had owned his fault in persecuting David, and acknowledged David's title to the crown, yet here he revives the persecution, so perfectly lost was he to all sense of honour and virtue. I. The Ziphites informed him where David was (ver. 1), and thereupon he marched out with a considerable force in quest of him, ver. 2, 3. II. David gained intelligence of his motions (ver. 4), and took a view of his camp, ver. 5. III. He and one of his men ventured into his camp in the night and found him and all his guards fast asleep, ver. 6, 7. IV. David, though much urged to it by his companions, would not take away Saul's life, but only carried off his spear and his cruse of water, ver. 8—12. V. He produced these as a further witness for him that he did not design any ill to Saul, and reasoned with him upon his conduct, ver. 13—20. VI. Saul was hereby convinced of his error, and once more desisted from persecuting David, ver. 21—25. The story is much like that which we had ch. xxiv. In both David is delivered out of Saul's hand, and Saul out of David's.

AND the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon? 2 Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3 And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. 4 David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed. 5 And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench and the people pitched round about him.

Here, 1. Saul gets information of David's movements and acts offensively. The Ziphites came to him and told him where David now was, in the same place where he was when they formerly betrayed him, ch. xxiii. 19. Perhaps (though it is not mentioned) Saul had given them intimation, under-hand, that he continued his design against David, and would be glad of their assistance. If not, they were very officious to Saul, aware of what would please him, and very malicious against David, to whom they despaired of ever reconciling themselves, and therefore they stirred up Saul (who needed no such spur) against him, v. 1. For aught we know, Saul would have continued in the same good mind that he was in (ch. xxiv. 17), and would not have given David this fresh trouble, if the Ziphites had not put him on. See what need we have to pray to God that, since we

have so much of the tincture of corruption in our own hearts, the sparks of temptation may be kept far from us, lest, if they come together, we be set on fire of hell. Saul readily caught at the information, and went down with an army of 3000 men to the place where David hid himself, *v. 2*. How soon do un sanctified hearts lose the good impressions which their convictions have made upon them and return with the dog to their vomit!

2. David gets information of Saul's movements and acts defensively. He did not march out to meet and fight him; he sought only his own safety, not Saul's ruin; therefore he *abode in the wilderness* (*v. 3*), putting thereby a great force upon himself, and curbing the bravery of his own spirit by a silent retirement, showing more true valour than he could have done by an irregular resistance. (1.) He had spies who informed him of Saul's descent, *that he had come in very deed* (*v. 4*); for he would not believe that Saul would deal so basely with him till he had the utmost evidence of it. (2.) He observed with his own eyes how Saul was encamped, *v. 5*. He came towards the place where Saul and his men had pitched their tents, so near as to be able, undiscovered, to take a view of their entrenchments, probably in the dusk of the evening.

6 Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. 7 So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. 8 Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. 9 And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? 10 David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. 11 The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the

spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12 So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them.

Here is, I. David's bold adventure into Saul's camp in the night, accompanied only by his kinsman Abishai, the son of Zeruiah. He proposed it to him and to another of his confidants (*v. 6*), but the other either declined it as too dangerous an enterprise, or at least was content that Abishai, who was forward to it, should run the risk of it rather than himself. Whether David was prompted to do this by his own courage, or by an extraordinary impression upon his spirits, or by the oracle, does not appear; but, like Gideon, he ventured through the guards, with a special assurance of the divine protection.

II. The posture he found the camp in: *Saul lay sleeping in the trench*, or, as some read it, *in his chariot, and in the midst of his carriages, with his spear stuck in the ground* by him, to be ready if his quarters should be beaten up (*v. 7*); and all the soldiers, even those that were appointed to stand sentinel, were *fast asleep*, *v. 12*. Thus were their eyes closed and their hands bound, *for a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them*; something extraordinary there was in it that they should all be asleep together, and so fast asleep that David and Abishai walked and talked among them, and yet none of them stirred. Sleep, when God gives it to his beloved, is their rest and refreshment; but he can, when he pleases, make it to his enemies their imprisonment. Thus are the *stout-hearted spoiled; they have slept their sleep, and none of the men of might have found their hands, at thy rebuke, O God of Jacob!* Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6. *It was a deep sleep from the Lord*, who has the command of the powers of nature, and makes them to serve his purposes as he pleases. Whom God will disable, or destroy, he binds up with a *spirit of slumber*, Rom. xi. 8. How helpless do Saul and all his forces lie, all, in effect, disarmed and chained! and yet nothing is done to them; they are only rocked asleep. How easily can God weaken the strongest, befoul the wisest, and baffle the most watchful! Let all his friends therefore trust him and all his enemies fear him.

III. Abishai's request to David for a commission to dispatch Saul with the spear that stuck at his bolster, which (now that he lay so fair) he undertook to do at one blow, *v. 8*. He would not urge David to kill him himself, because he had declined doing this before when he had a similar opportunity; but he begged



earnestly that David would give him leave to do it, pleading that he was his enemy, not only cruel and implacable, but false and perfidious, whom no reason would rule nor kindness work upon, and that *God had now delivered him into his hand*, and did in effect bid him strike. The last advantage he had of this kind was indeed but accidental, when Saul happened to be in the cave with him at the same time. But in this there was something extraordinary; the deep sleep that had fallen on Saul and all his guards was manifestly from the Lord, so that it was a special providence which gave him this opportunity; he ought not therefore to let it slip.

IV. David's generous refusal to suffer any harm to be done to Saul, and in it a resolute adherence to his principles of loyalty, v. 9. David charged Abishai not to destroy him, would not only not do it himself, but not permit another to do it. And he gave two reasons for it:—1. It would be a sinful affront to God's ordinance. Saul was the Lord's anointed, king of Israel by the special appointment and nomination of the God of Israel, the power that was, and to resist him was to resist the ordinance of God, Rom. xiii. 2. No man could do it and be guiltless. The thing he feared was guilt and his concern respected his innocence more than his safety. 2. It would be a sinful anticipation of God's providence. God had sufficiently shown him, in Nabal's case, that, if he left it to him to avenge him, he would do it in due time. Encouraged therefore by his experience in that instance, he resolves to wait till God shall think fit to avenge him on Saul, and he will by no means *avenge himself* (v. 10): "*The Lord shall smite him*, as he did Nabal, with some sudden stroke, or he shall *die in battle* (as it proved he did soon after), or, if not, *his day shall come to die* a natural death, and I will contentedly wait till then, rather than force my way to the promised crown by any indirect methods." The temptation indeed was very strong; but, if he should yield, he would sin against God, and therefore he will resist the temptation with the utmost resolution (v. 11): "*The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed*; no, I will never do it, nor suffer it to be done." Thus bravely does he prefer his conscience to his interest and trusts God with the issue.

V. The improvement he made of this opportunity for the further evidence of his own integrity. He and Abishai carried away the spear and cruse of water which Saul had by his bed-side (v. 12), and, which was very strange, none of all the guards were aware of it. If a physician had given them the strongest opiate or stupifying dose, they could not have been faster locked up with sleep. Saul's spear which he had by him for defence, and his cup of water which he had for his refreshment, were both stolen from him while he slept. Thus do we lose

our strength and our comfort when we are careless, and secure, and off our watch.

13 Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off; a great space *being* between them: 14 And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner? Then Abner answered and said, *Who art thou that criest to the king?* 15 And David said to Abner, *Art not thou a valiant man?* and *who is like to thee in Israel?* wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. 16 This thing *is* not good that thou hast done. *As the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die*, because ye have not kept your master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear *is*, and the cruse of water that *was* at his bolster. 17 And Saul knew David's voice, and said, *Is this thy voice, my son David?* And David said, *It is my voice, my lord, O king* 18 And he said, *Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant?* for what have I done? or what evil *is* in mine hand? 19 Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the LORD have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if *they be* the children of men, cursed *be* they before the LORD; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, *Go, serve other gods.* 20 Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains.

David having got safely from Saul's camp himself, and having brought with him proofs sufficient that he had been there, posts himself conveniently, so that they might hear him and yet not reach him (v. 13), and then begins to reason with them upon what had passed.

I. He reasons ironically with Abner, and keenly banters him. David knew well that it was from the mighty power of God that Abner and the rest of the guards were cast into so deep a sleep, and that God's immediate hand was in it; but he reproaches

Abner as unworthy to be captain of the life-guards, since he could sleep when the king his master lay so much exposed. By this it appears that the hand of God locked them up in this deep sleep that, as soon as ever David had got out of danger, a very little thing awakened them, even David's voice at a great distance roused them, *v.* 14. Abner got up (we may suppose it early in a summer's morning) and enquired who called, and disturbed the king's repose. "It is I," says David, and then he upbraids him with his sleeping when he should have been upon his guard. Perhaps Abner, looking upon David as a despicable enemy and one that there was no danger from, had neglected to set a watch; however, he himself ought to have been more wakeful. David, to put him into confusion, told him, 1. That he had lost his honour (*v.* 15): "*Art not thou a man?* (so the word is), a man in office, that art bound, by the duty of thy place, to inspect the soldiery? Art not thou in reputation for a valiant man? So thou wouldst be esteemed, a man of such courage and conduct that there is none like thee; but now thou art shamed for ever. Thou a general! Thou, a slug-gard!" 2. That he deserved to lose his head (*v.* 16): "*You are all worthy to die*, by martial law, for being off your guard, when you had the king himself asleep in the midst of you. *Ecce signum—Behold this token.* See where the king's spear is, in the hand of him whom the king himself is pleased to count his enemy. Those that took away this might as easily and safely have taken away his life. Now see who are the king's best friends, you that neglected him and left him exposed, or I that protected him when he was exposed. You pursue me as worthy to die, and irritate Saul against me; but who is worthy to die now?" Note, Sometimes those that unjustly condemn others are justly left to fall into condemnation themselves.

II. He reasons seriously and affectionately with Saul. By this time he was so well awake as to hear what was said, and to discern who said it (*v.* 17): "*Is this thy voice, my son David?*" In the same manner he had expressed his relentings, *ch.* xxiv. 16. He had given his wife to another and yet calls him *son*, thirsted after his blood and yet is glad to hear his voice. Those are bad indeed that have never any convictions of good, nor ever sincerely utter good expressions. And now David has as fair an opportunity of reaching Saul's conscience as he had just now of taking away his life. This he lays hold on, though not of that, and enters into a close argument with him, concerning the trouble he still continued to give him, endeavouring to persuade him to let fall the prosecution and be reconciled.

1. He complains of the very melancholy condition he was brought into by the enmity of Saul against him. Two things he laments:—(1.) That he was driven from his

master and from his business: "*My lord pursues after his servant, v.* 18. How gladly would I serve thee as formerly if my service might be accepted! but, instead of being owned as a servant, I am pursued as a rebel, and my lord is my enemy, and he whom I would follow with respect compels me to flee from him." (2.) That he was driven from his God and from his religion; and this was a much greater grievance than the former (*v.* 19): "*They have driven me out from the inheritance of the Lord, have made Canaan too hot for me, at least the inhabited parts of it, have forced me into the deserts and mountains, and will, ere long, oblige me entirely to quit the country.*" And that which troubled him was not so much that he was driven out from his own inheritance as that he was driven out from the *inheritance of the Lord*, the holy land. It should be more comfortable to us to think of God's title to our estates and his interest in them than of our own, and that with them we may honour him than that with them we may maintain ourselves. Nor was it so much his trouble that he was constrained to live among strangers as that he was constrained to live among the worshippers of strange gods and was thereby thrust into temptation to join with them in their idolatrous worship. His enemies did, in effect, send him to *go and serve other gods*, and perhaps he had heard that some of them had spoken to that purport of him. Those that forbid our attendance on God's ordinances do what in them lies to estrange us from God and to make us heathens. If David had not been a man of extraordinary grace, and firmness to his religion, the ill usage he met with from his own prince and people, who were Israelites and worshippers of the true God, would have prejudiced him against the religion they professed and have driven him to communicate with idolaters. "If these be Israelites," he might have said, "let me live and die with Philistines;" and no thanks to them that their conduct had not that effect. We are to reckon that the greatest injury that can be done us which exposes us to sin. Of those who thus led David into temptation he here says, *Cursed be they before the Lord.* Those fall under a curse that thrust out those whom God receives, and send those to the devil who are dear to God.

2. He insists upon his own innocency: "*What have I done or what evil is in my hand?*" *v.* 18. He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had never done nor ever designed any mischief to the person, honour, or government, of his prince, nor to any of the interests of his country. He had lately had Saul's own testimony concerning him (*ch.* xxiv. 17): "*Thou art more righteous than I.*" It was very unreasonable and wicked for Saul to pursue him as a criminal, when he could not charge him with any crime

3. He endeavours to convince Saul that his pursuit of him is not only wrong, but mean, and much below him: "*The king of Israel, whose dignity is great, and who has so much other work to do, has come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains.*" v. 20—a poor game for the king of Israel to pursue. He compares himself to a partridge, a very innocent harmless bird, which, when attempts are made upon its life, flies if it can, but makes no resistance. And would Saul bring the flower of his army into the field only to hunt one poor partridge? What a disparagement was this to his honour! What a stain would it be on his memory to trample upon so weak and patient as well as so innocent an enemy! James v. 6, *You have killed the just, and he doth not resist you.*

4. He desires that the core of the controversy may be searched into and some proper method taken to bring it to an end, v. 19. Saul himself could not say that justice put him on thus to persecute David, or that he was obliged to do it for the public safety. David was not willing to say (though it was very true) that Saul's own envy and malice put him on to do it; and therefore he concludes it must be attributed either to the righteous judgment of God or to the unrighteous designs of evil men. Now, (1.) "*If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, either in displeasure to me (taking this way to punish me for my sins against him, though, as to thee, I am guiltless) or in displeasure to thee, if it be the effect of that evil spirit from the Lord which troubles thee, let him accept an offering from us both—let us join in making our peace with God, reconciling ourselves to him, which may be done, by sacrifice; and then I hope the sin will be pardoned, whatever it is, and the trouble, which is so great a vexation both to thee and me, will come to an end.*" See the right method of peace-making; let us first make God our friend by Christ the great Sacrifice, and then all other enmities shall be slain, Eph. ii. 16; Prov. xvi. 7. But, (2.) "*If thou art incited to it by wicked men, that incense thee against me, cursed be they before they Lord,*" that is, they are very wicked people, and it is fit that they should be abandoned as such, and excluded from the king's court and councils. He decently lays the blame upon the evil counsellors who advised the king to that which was dishonourable and dishonest, and insists upon it that they be removed from about him and forbidden his presence, as men cursed before the Lord, and then he hoped he should gain his petition, which is (v. 20), "*Let not my blood fall to the earth, as thou threatenest, for it is before the face of the Lord, who will take cognizance of the wrong and avenge it.*" Thus pathetically does David plead with Saul for his life, and, in order to that, for his favourable opinion of him.

21 Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. 22 And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23 The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed. 24 And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation. 25 Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Here is, I. Saul's penitent confession of his fault and folly in persecuting David and his promise to do so no more. This second instance of David's respect to him wrought more upon him than the former, and extorted from him better acknowledgements, v. 21. 1. He owns himself melted and quite overcome by David's kindness to him: "*My soul was precious in thy eyes this day, which, I thought, had been odious!*" 2. He acknowledges he has done very wrong to persecute him, that he has therein acted against God's law (*I have sinned*), and against his own interest (*I have played the fool*), in pursuing him as an enemy who would have been one of his best friends, if he could but have thought so. "Herein (says he) I have erred exceedingly, and wronged both thee and myself." Note, Those that sin play the fool and err exceedingly, those especially that hate and persecute God's people, Job xix. 28. 3. He invites him to court again: *Return, my son David.* Those that have understanding will see it to be their interest to have those about them that *behave themselves wisely*, as David did, and have God with them. 4. He promises him that he will not persecute him as he has done, but protect him: *I will no more do thee harm.* We have reason to think, according to the mind he was now in, that he meant as he said, and yet neither his confession nor his promise of amendment came from a principle of true repentance.

II. David's improvement of Saul's convictions and confessions and the evidence he had to produce of his own sincerity. He

desired that one of the footmen might fetch the spear (r. 22), and then (v. 23). 1. He appeals to God as judge of the controversy: *The Lord render to every man his righteousness.* David, by faith, is sure that he will do it because he infallibly knows the true characters of all persons and actions and is inflexibly just to render to every man according to his work, and, by prayer, he desires he would do it. Herein he does, in effect, pray against Saul, who had dealt unrighteously and unfaithfully with him (*Give them according to their deeds*, Ps. xxviii. 4); but he principally intends it as a prayer for himself, that God would protect him in his righteousness and faithfulness, and also reward him, since Saul so ill requited him. 2. He reminds Saul again of the proof he had now given of his respect to him from a principle of loyalty: *I would not stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed*, intimating to Saul that the anointing oil was his protection, for which he was indebted to the Lord and ought to express his gratitude to him (had he been a common person David would not have been so tender of him), perhaps with this further implication, that Saul knew, or had reason to think, David was the Lord's anointed too, and therefore, by the same rule, Saul ought to be as tender of David's life as David had been of his. 3. Not relying much upon Saul's promises, he puts himself under God's protection and begs his favour (v. 24): *Let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord*, how light soever thou makest of it." Thus, for his kindness to Saul, he takes God to be his paymaster, which those may with a holy confidence do that *do well and suffer for it.*

III. Saul's prediction of David's advancement. He commends him (v. 25): *Blessed be thou, my son David.* So strong was the conviction Saul was now under of David's honesty that he was not ashamed to condemn himself and applaud David, even in the hearing of his own soldiers, who could not but blush to think that they had come out so furiously against a man whom their master, when he meets him, caresses thus. He foretels his victories, and his elevation at last: *Thou shalt do great things.* Note, Those who make conscience of doing that which is truly good may come, by the divine assistance, to do that which is truly great. He adds, *Thou shalt also still prevail*, more and more," he means against himself, but is loth to speak that out. The princely qualities which appeared in David—his generosity in sparing Saul, his military authority in reprimanding Abner for sleeping, his care of the public good, and the signal tokens of God's presence with him—convinced Saul that he would certainly be advanced to the throne at last, according to the prophecies concerning him.

Lastly, A palliative cure being thus made of the wound, they parted friends. Saul returned

to Gibeah *re infecta*—without accomplishing his design, and ashamed of the expedition he had made; but David could not take his word so far as to return with him. Those that have once been false are not easily trusted another time. Therefore *David went on his way.* And, after this parting, it does not appear that ever Saul and David saw one another again.

#### CHAP. XXVII.

David was a man after God's own heart, and yet he had his faults, which are recorded, not for our imitation, but for our admonition; witness the story of this chapter, in which, though, 1. We find, to his praise, that he prudently took care of his own safety and his family's (ver. 2-4) and valiantly fought Israel's battles against the Canaanites (ver. 8-9), yet, II. We find, to his dishonour, 1. That he began to despair of his deliverance, ver. 1. 2. That he deserted his own country, and went to dwell in the land of the Philistines, ver. 1, 5-7. 3. That he imposed upon Achish with an equivocation, if not a lie, concerning his expedition, ver. 10-12.

AND David said in his heart, **A**I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: *there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.* 2 And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that *were* with him unto Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath. 3 And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, *even* David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, 2, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife. 4 And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him. 5 And David said unto Achish, if I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee? 6 Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day. 7 And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months.

Here is, I. The prevalency of David's fear, which was the effect of the weakness of his faith (r. 1): *He said to his heart* (so it may be read), in his communings with it concerning his present condition, *I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.* He represented to himself the restless rage and malice of Saul (who could not be wrought into a reconciliation) and the treachery of his own countrymen, witness that of the Ziphites,

once and again; he looked upon his own forces, and observed how few they were, and that no recruits had come in to him for a great while, nor could he perceive that he got any ground; and hence, in a melancholy mood, he draws this dark conclusion: *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.* But, *O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt?* Was he not anointed to be king? Did not that imply an assurance that he should be preserved to the kingdom? Though he had no reason to trust Saul's promises, had he not all the reason in the world to trust the promises of God? His experience of the particular care Providence took of him ought to have encouraged him. He that has delivered does and will. But unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. When *without are fightings, within are fears,* and it is a hard matter to get over them. *Lord, increase our faith!*

II. The resolution he came to hereupon. Now that Saul had, for this time, returned to his place, he determined to take this opportunity of retiring into the Philistines' country. Consulting his own heart only, and not the ephod or the prophet, he concludes, *There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.* Long trials are in danger of tiring the faith and patience even of very good men. Now, 1. Saul was an enemy to himself and his kingdom in driving David to this extremity. He weakened his own interest when he expelled from his service, and forced into the service of his enemies, so great a general as David was, and so brave a regiment as he had the command of. 2. David was no friend to himself in taking this course. God had appointed him to set up his standard in the land of Judah, *ch. xxii. 5.* There God had wonderfully preserved him, and employed him sometimes for the good of his country; why then should he think of deserting his post? How could he expect the protection of the God of Israel if he went out of the borders of the land of Israel? Could he expect to be safe among the Philistines, out of whose hands he had lately escaped so narrowly by feigning himself mad? Would he receive obligations from those now whom he knew he must not return kindness to when he should come to be king, but be under an obligation to make war upon? Hereby he would gratify his enemies, who bade him go and serve other gods that they might have wherewith to reproach him, and very much weaken the hands of his friends, who would not have wherewith to answer that reproach. See what need we have to pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation.*

III. The kind reception he had at Gath. Achish bade him welcome, partly out of generosity, being proud of entertaining so brave a man, partly out of policy, hoping to engage him for ever to his service, and that

his example would invite many more to desert and come over to him. No doubt he gave David a solemn promise of protection, which he could rely upon when he could not trust Saul's promises. We may blush to think that the word of a Philistine should go further than the word of an Israelite, who, if an Israelite indeed, would be without guile, and that the city of Gath should be a place of refuge for a good man when the cities of Israel refuse him a safe abode. David, 1. Brought his men with him (*v. 2*) that they might guard him, and might themselves be safe where he was, and to recommend himself the more to Achish, who hoped to have service out of him. 3. He brought his family with him, his *wives and his household*, so did all *his men*, *v. 2, 3.* Masters of families ought to take care of those that are committed to them, to protect and provide for those of their own house, and to *dwell with them as men of knowledge.*

IV. Saul's desisting from the further prosecution of him (*v. 4*): *He sought no more again for him*; this intimates that notwithstanding the professions of repentance he had lately made, if he had had David in his reach, he would have aimed another blow. But, because he dares not come where he is, he resolves to let him alone. Thus many seem to leave their sins, but really their sins leave them; they would persist in them if they could. Saul sought no more for him, contenting himself with his banishment, since he could not have his blood, and hoping, it may be (as he had done, *ch. xviii. 25*), that he would, some time or other, *fall by the hand of the Philistines*; and, though he would rather have the pleasure of destroying him himself, yet, if they do it, he will be satisfied, so that it be done effectually.

V. David's removal from Gath to Ziklag.

1. David's request for leave to remove was prudent and very modest, *v. 5.* (1.) It was really prudent. David knew what it was to be envied in the court of Saul, and had much more reason to fear in the court of Achish, and therefore declines preferment there, and wishes for a settlement in the country, where he might be private, more within himself, and less in other people's way. In a town of his own he might have the more free exercise of his religion, and keep his men better to it, and not have his righteous soul vexed, as it was at Gath, with the idolatries of the Philistines. (2.) As it was presented to Achish it was very modest. He does not prescribe to him what place he should assign him, only begs it may be in some town in the country, where he pleased (beggars must not be choosers); but he gives this for a reason, "*Why should thy servant dwell in the royal city, to crowd thee, and disoblige those about thee?*" Note, Those that would stand fast must not cover to stand high; and humble souls aim not to dwell in royal cities.

2. The grant which Achish made to him, upon that request, was very generous and kind (v. 6, 7): *Achish gave him Ziklag*. Hereby, (1.) Israel recovered their ancient right; for Ziklag was in the lot of the tribe of Judah (Josh. xv. 31), and afterwards, out of that lot, was assigned, with some other cities, to Simeon, Josh. xix. 5. But either it was never subdued, or the Philistines had, in some struggle with Israel, made themselves masters of it. Perhaps they had got it unjustly, and Achish, being a man of sense and honour, took this occasion to restore it. *The righteous God judgeth righteously*. (2.) David gained a commodious settlement, not only at a distance from Gath, but bordering upon Israel, where he might keep up a correspondence with his own countrymen, and whither they might resort to him at the revolution that was now approaching. Though we do not find that he augmented his forces at all while Saul lived (for, *ch. xxx. 10*, he had but his *six hundred men*), yet, immediately after Saul's death, that was the rendezvous of his friends. Nay, it should seem, while he kept himself close because of Saul, multitudes resorted to him, at least to assure him of their sincere intentions, 1 Chron. xii. 1—22. And this further advantage David gained, that Ziklag was annexed to the crown, at least the royalty of it pertained to the kings of Judah, ever after, v. 6. Note, There is nothing lost by humility and modesty, and a willingness to retire. Real advantages follow those that flee from imaginary honours. Here David continued for some days, even *four months*, as it may very well be read (v. 7), or some days above four months: the LXX. read it, *some months*; so long he waited for the set time of his accession to the throne; for *he that believeth shall not make haste*.

8 And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those *nations were* of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt. 9 And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish. 10 And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to day? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites. 11 And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring *tidings* to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did

David, and so *will be* his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines. 12 And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.

Here is an account of David's actions while he was in the land of the Philistines, a fierce attack he made upon some remains of the devoted nations, his success in it, and the representation he gave of it to Achish. 1. We may acquit him of injustice and cruelty in this action because those people whom he cut off were such as heaven had long since doomed to destruction, and he that did it was one whom heaven had ordained to dominion; so that the thing was very fit to be done, and he was very fit to do it. It was not for him that was anointed to fight the Lord's battles to sit still in sloth, however he might think fit, in modesty, to retire. He desired to be safe from Saul only that he might expose himself for Israel. He avenged an old quarrel that God had with these nations, and at the same time fetched in provisions for himself and his army, for by their swords they must live. The Amalekites were to be all cut off. Probably the Geshurites and Gezrites were branches of Amalek. Saul was rejected for sparing them, David makes up the deficiency of his obedience before he succeeds him. He smote them, and *left none alive*, v. 8, 9. The service paid itself, for they carried off abundance of spoil, which served for the subsistence of David's forces. 2. Yet we cannot acquit him of dissimulation with Achish in the account he gave him of this expedition. (1.) David, it seems, was not willing that he should know the truth, and therefore spared none to carry tidings to Gath (v. 11), not because he was ashamed of what he had done as a bad thing, but because he was afraid, if the Philistines knew it, they would be apprehensive of danger to themselves or their allies by harbouring him among them and would expel him from their coasts. It would be easy to conclude, *If so he did, so will be his manner*, and therefore he industriously conceals it from them, which, it seems, he could do by putting them all to the sword, for none of their neighbours would inform against him, nor perhaps would soon come to the knowledge of what was done, intelligence not being so readily communicated then as now. (2.) He hid it from Achish with an equivocation not at all becoming his character. Being asked which way he had made his sally, he answered, *Against the south of Judah*, v. 13. It was true he had invaded those countries that lay south of Judah, but he made Achish believe he had invaded those that lay south in Judah, the Ziphites for example, that had once and again betrayed

him; so Achish understood him, and thence inferred that he had made his people Israel to abhor him, and so rivetted himself in the interest of Achish. The fidelity of Achish to him, his good opinion of him, and the confidence he put in him, aggravate his sin in deceiving him thus, which, with some other such instances, David seems penitently to reflect upon when he prays, *Remove from me the way of lying.*

## CHAP. XXVIII.

Preparations are herein making for that war which will put an end to the life and reign of Saul, and so make way for David to the throne. In this war, 1. The Philistines are the aggressors and Achish their king makes David his confidant, ver. 1, 2. II. The Israelites prepare to receive them, and Saul their king makes the devil his privy-counsellor, and thereby fills the measure of his iniquity. Observe, 1. The despairing condition which Saul was in, ver. 3—6. 2. The application he made to a witch, to bring him up Samuel, ver. 7—14. 3. His discourse with the apparition, ver. 15—19. The damp it struck upon him, ver. 20—23.

AND it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men. 2 And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do. And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head for ever. 3 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land. 4 And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. 5 And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. 6 And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

Here is, I. The design of the Philistines against Israel. They resolved to fight them, v. 1. If the Israelites had not forsaken God, there would have been no Philistines remaining to molest them; if Saul had not forsaken him, they would by this time have been put out of all danger by them. The Philistines took an opportunity to make this attempt when they had David among them, whom they feared more than Saul and all his forces.

II. The expectation Achish had of assistance from David in this war, and the encouragement David gave him to expect it:

"Thou shalt go with me to battle," says Achish. "If I protect thee, I may demand service from thee;" and he will think himself happy if he may have such a man as David on his side, who prospered whithersoever he went. David gave him an ambiguous answer: "We will see what will be done; it will be time enough to talk of that hereafter; but surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do" (v. 2), that is, "I will consider in what post I may be best able to serve thee, if thou wilt but give me leave to choose it." Thus he keeps himself free from a promise to serve him and yet keeps up his expectation of it; for Achish took it in no other sense than as an engagement to assist him, and promised him, thereupon, that he would make him captain of the guards, protector, or prime-minister of state.

III. The drawing of the armies, on both sides, into the field (v. 4): *The Philistines pitched in Shunem*, which was in the tribe of Issachar, a great way north from their country. The land of Israel, it seems, was ill-guarded, when the Philistines could march their army into the very heart of the country. Saul, while he pursued David, left his people naked and exposed. On some of the adjacent mountains of Gilboa Saul mustered his forces, and prepared to engage the Philistines, which he had little heart to do now that the *Spirit of the Lord had departed from him.*

IV. The terror Saul was in, and the loss he was at, upon this occasion: He saw the host of the Philistines, and by his own view of them, and the intelligence his spies brought him, he perceived they were more numerous, better armed, and in better heart, than his own were, which made him afraid, so that his heart greatly trembled, v. 5. Had he kept close to God, he needed not have been afraid at the sight of an army of Philistines; but now that he had provoked God to forsake him his interest failed, his armies dwindled and looked mean, and, which was worse, his spirits failed him, his heart sunk within him, a guilty conscience made him tremble at the shaking of a leaf. Now he remembered the guilty blood of the Amalekites which he had spared, and the innocent blood of the priests which he had spilt. His sins were set in order before his eyes, which put him into confusion, embarrassed all his counsels, robbed him of all his courage, and produced in him a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Note, Troubles are terrors to the children of disobedience. In this distress Saul enquired of the Lord, v. 6. Need drives those to God who in the day of their prosperity slighted his oracles and altars. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee*, Isa. xxvi. 16. Did ever any seek the Lord and not find him? Yes, Saul did; *the Lord answered him not*, took no notice either of his petitions or of his enquiries; gave him no directions what to do,

nor any encouragement to hope that he would be with him. *Should he be enquired of at all by such a one as Saul?* Ezek. xiv. 3. No, he could not expect an answer of peace, for, 1. He enquired in such a manner that it was as if he had *not enquired at all*. Therefore it is said (1 Chron. x. 14), *He enquired not of the Lord*; for he did it faintly and coldly, and with a secret design, if God did not answer him, to consult the devil. He did not enquire in faith, but with a double unstable mind. 2. He enquired of the Lord when it was too late, when the days of his probation were over and he was finally rejected. *Seek the Lord while he may be found*, for there is a time when he will not be found. 3. He had forfeited the benefit of all the methods of enquiry. Could he that hated and persecuted Samuel and David, who were both prophets, expect to be answered by prophets? Could he that had slain the high priest, expect to be answered by Urim? Or could he that had sinned away the Spirit of grace, expect to be answered by dreams? No. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.*

V. The mention of some things that had happened a good while ago, to introduce the following story, v. 3. 1. The death of Samuel. Samuel was dead, which made the Philistines the more bold and Saul the more afraid; for, had Samuel been alive, Saul probably thought that his presence and countenance, his good advice and good prayers, would have availed him in his distress. 2. Saul's edict against witchcraft. He had put the laws in execution against *those that had familiar spirits*, who must not be *suffered to live*, Exod. xxii. 18. Some think that he did this in the beginning of his reign, while he was under Samuel's influence; others think that it was lately done, for it is spoken of here (v. 9) as a late edict. Perhaps when Saul was himself troubled with an evil spirit he suspected that he was bewitched, and, for that reason, cut off all that had familiar spirits. Many seem zealous against sin, when they themselves are any way hurt by it (they will inform against swearers if they swear at them, or against drunkards if in their drink they abuse them), who otherwise have no concern for the glory of God, nor any dislike of sin as sin. However it was commendable in Saul thus to use his power for the terror and restraint of these evil-doers. Note, Many seem enemies to sin in others, while they indulge it in themselves. Saul will drive the devil out of his kingdom, and yet harbour him in his heart, by envy and malice.

7 Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, *there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor.*

8 And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me *him* up, whom I shall name unto thee. 9 And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die? 10 And Saul sware to her by the LORD, saying, *As the LORD liveth*, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. 11 Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. 12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou *art* Saul. 13 And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. 14 And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up: and he *is* covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel, and he stooped with *his* face to the ground, and bowed himself.

Here, I. Saul seeks for a witch, v. 7. When God *answered him not*, if he had humbled himself by repentance and persevered in seeking God, who knows but that at length he might have been entreated for him? but, since he can discern no comfort either from heaven or earth (Isa. viii. 21, 22), he resolves to knock at the gates of hell, and to see if any there will befriend him and give him advice: *Seek me a woman that has a familiar spirit*, v. 7. And his servants were too officious to serve him in this evil affair: they presently recommended one to him at Endor (a city not far off) who had escaped the execution of Saul's edict. To her he resolves to apply. Herein he is chargeable, 1. With contempt of the God of Israel; as if any creature could do him a kindness when God had left him and frowned upon him. 2. With contradiction to himself. He knew the heinousness of the sin of witchcraft, else he would not have cut off those that had familiar spirits; yet now he had recourse to that as an oracle which he had before condemned as an abomination. It is common



for men to inveigh severely against those sins which they are in no temptation to, but afterwards to be themselves overcome by them. Had one told Saul, when he was destroying the witches, that he himself would, ere long, consult with one, he would have said, as Hazael did, *What? Is thy servant a dog?* But who knows what mischiefs those will run into that forsake God and are forsaken of him?

II. Hearing of one he hastens to her, but goes by night, and in disguise, only with two servants, and probably on foot, *v. 8*. See how those that are led captive by Satan are forced, 1. To disparage themselves. Never did Saul look so mean as when he went sneaking to a sorry witch to know his fortune. 2. To dissemble. Evil works are works of darkness, and they hate the light, neither care for coming to it. Saul went to the witch, not in his robes, but in the habit of a common soldier, not only lest the witch herself, if she had known him, should decline to serve him, either fearing he came to trepan her or resolving to be avenged on him for his edict against those of her profession, but lest his own people should know it and abhor him for it. Such is the power of natural conscience that even those who do evil blush and are ashamed to do it.

III. He tells her his errand and promises her impunity. 1. All he desires of her is to bring up one from the dead, whom he had a mind to discourse with. It was necromancy, or divination by the dead, that he hoped to serve his purpose by. This was expressly forbidden by the law (*Deut. xviii. 11*), seeking for the living to the dead, *Isa. viii. 19*. *Bring me up him whom I shall name, v. 8*. This supposes that it was generally taken for granted that souls exist after death, and that when men die there is not an end of them: it supposes too that great knowledge was attributed to separate souls. But to think that any good souls would come up at the beck of an evil spirit, or that God, who had denied a man the benefit of his own institutions, would suffer him to reap any real advantage by a cursed diabolical invention, was very absurd. 2. She signifies her fear of the law, and her suspicion that this stranger came to draw her into a snare (*v. 9*): *Thou knowest what Saul has done*. Providence ordered it so that Saul should be told to his face of his edict against witches, at this very time when he was consulting one, for the greater aggravation of his sin. She insists upon the peril of the law, perhaps to raise her price; for, though no mention is made of her fee, no doubt she demanded and had a large one. Observe how sensible she is of danger from the edict of Saul, and what care she is in to guard against it; but not at all apprehensive of the obligations of God's law and the terrors of his wrath. She considered what *Saul* had done, not what *God* had done, against such practices, and feared

a snare laid for her life more than a snare laid for her soul. It is common for sinners to be more afraid of punishment from men than of God's righteous judgment. But, 3. Saul promises with an oath not to betray her, *v. 10*. It was his duty as a king to punish her and he knew it, yet he swears not to do it; as if he could by his own oath bind himself from doing that which, by the divine command, he was bound to do. But he promised more than he could perform when he said, *There shall no punishment happen to thee*; for he that could not secure himself could much less secure her from divine vengeance.

IV. Samuel, who was lately dead, is the person whom Saul desired to have some talk with; and the witch, with her enchantments, gratifies his desire, and brings them together. 1. As soon as Saul had given the witch the assurance she desired (that he would not discover her) she applied to her witchcrafts, and asked very confidently, *Whom shall I bring up to thee?* *v. 11*. Note, Hopes of impunity embolden sinners in their evil ways and harden their hearts. 2. Saul desires to speak with Samuel: *Bring me up Samuel*. Samuel had anointed him to the kingdom and had formerly been his faithful friend and counsellor, and therefore with him he wished to advise. While Samuel was living at Ramah, not far from Gibeah of Saul, and presided there in the school of the prophets, we never read of Saul's going to him to consult him in any of the difficulties he was in (it would have been well for him if he had); then he slighted him, and perhaps hated him, looking upon him to be in David's interest. But now that he is dead, "O for Samuel again! By all means, *bring me up Samuel*." Note, Many that despise and persecute God's saints and ministers when they are living would be glad to have them again when they are gone. *Send Lazarus to me, and send Lazarus to my father's house, Luke xvi. 24—27*. The sepulchres of the righteous are garnished. 3. Here is a seeming defector chasm in the story. Saul said, *Bring me up Samuel*, and the very next words are, *When the woman saw Samuel, (v. 12)*, whereas one would have expected to be told how she performed the operation, what spells and charms she used, or that some little intimation would be given of what she said or did; but the profound silence of the scripture concerning it forbids our coveting to *know the depths of Satan* (*Rev. ii. 24*) or to have our curiosity gratified with an account of the mysteries of iniquity. It has been said of the books of some of the popish confessors that, by their description of sin, they have taught men to commit it but the scripture conceals sinful art, that we may be *simple concerning evil, Rom. xvi. 19*. 4. The witch, upon sight of the apparition, was aware that her client was Saul, her familiar spirit, it is likely, informing her of it (*v. 12*): "*Why hast thou deceived me with a*

disguise; for thou art Saul, the very man that I am afraid of above any man?" Thus she gave Saul to understand the power of her art, in that she could discover him through his disguise; and yet she feared lest, hereafter, at least, he should take advantage against her for what she was now doing. Had she believed that it was really Samuel whom she saw, she would have had more reason to be afraid of him, who was a good prophet, than of Saul, who was a wicked king. But the wrath of earthly princes is feared by most more than the wrath of the King of kings. 5. Saul (who, we may suppose, was kept at a distance in the next room) had her not to be afraid of him, but go on with the operation, and enquired *what she saw?* v. 13. *O*, says the woman, *I saw gods* (that is, a spirit) *ascending out of the earth*; they called angels *gods*, because spiritual beings. Poor gods that ascend out of the earth! But she speaks the language of the heathen, who had their infernal deities and had them in veneration. If Saul had thought it necessary to his conversation with Samuel that the body of Samuel should be called out of the grave, he would have taken the witch with him to Ramah, where his sepulchre was; but the design was wholly upon his soul, which yet, if it became visible, was expected to appear in the usual resemblance of the body; and God permitted the devil, to answer the design, to put on Samuel's shape, that those who would not receive the love of the truth might be given up to strong delusions and believe a lie. That it could not be the soul of Samuel himself they might easily apprehend when it ascended out of the earth, for the spirit of a man, much more of a good man, goes upward, Eccl. iii. 21. But, if people will be deceived, it is just with God to say, "Let them be deceived." That the devil, by the divine permission, should be able to personate Samuel is not strange, since he can transform himself into an angel of light! nor is it strange that he should be permitted to do it upon this occasion, that Saul might be driven to despair, by enquiring of the devil, since he would not, in a right manner, enquire of the Lord, by which he might have had comfort. Saul, being told of gods ascending, was eager to know what was the form of this deity, and in what shape he appeared, so far was he from conceiving any horror at it, his heart being wretchedly hardened by the deificity of sin. Saul, it seems, was not permitted to see any manner of similitude himself, but he must take the woman's word for it, that she saw an old man covered with a mantle, or robe, the habit of a judge, which Samuel had sometimes worn, and some think it was for the sake of that, and the majesty of its aspect, that she called this apparition *Elohim*, a god or gods; for so magistrates are styled, Ps. lxxxvii. 1. 6. Saul, perceiving, by the woman's description, that it was Sa-

mucl, stooped with his face to the ground, either, as it is generally taken, in reverence to Samuel, though he saw him not, or perhaps to listen to that soft and muttering voice which he now expected to hear (for those that had familiar spirits *peeped and muttered*, Isa. viii. 19); and it should seem Saul bowed himself (probably by the witch's direction) that he might hear what was whispered and listen carefully to it; for the voice of one that has a familiar spirit is said to come out of the ground, and to whisper out of the dust, Isa. xxix. 4. He would stoop to that who would not stoop to the word of God.

15 And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. 16 Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? 17 And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: 18 Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. 19 Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

We have here the conference between Saul and Satan. Saul came in disguise (v. 8), but Satan soon discovered him, v. 12. Satan comes in disguise, in the disguise of Samuel's mantle, and Saul cannot discover him. Such is the disadvantage we labour under, in wrestling with the rulers of the darkness of this world, that they know us, while we are ignorant of their wiles and devices.

1. The spectre, or apparition, personating Samuel, asks why he is sent for (v. 15): *Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?* To us this discovers that it was an evil spirit that personated Samuel; for (as bishop Patrick observes) it is not in the power of witches to disturb the rest of good men and to bring

them back into the world when they please ; nor would the true Samuel have acknowledged such a power in magical arts : but to Saul this was a proper device of Satan's, to draw veneration from him, to possess him with an opinion of the power of divination, and so to rivet him in the devil's interests.

II. Saul makes his complaint to this counterfeit Samuel, mistaking him for the true ; and a most doleful complaint it is : "*I am sorely distressed, and know not what to do, for the Philistines make war against me ; yet I should do well enough with them if I had but the tokens of God's presence with me ; but, alas ! God has departed from me.*" He complained not of God's withdrawals till he fell into trouble, till the *Philistines made war against him*, and then he began to lament God's departure. He that in his prosperity enquired not after God in his adversity thought it hard that God answered him not, nor took any notice of his enquiries, either by dreams or prophets, neither gave answers immediately himself nor sent them by any of his messengers. He does not, like a penitent, own the righteousness of God in this ; but, like a man enraged, flies out against God as unkind and flies off from him. *Therefore I have called thee ;* as if Samuel, a servant of God, would favour those whom God frowned upon, or as if a dead prophet could do him more service than the living ones. One would think, from this, that he really desired to meet with the devil, and expected no other (though under the covert of Samuel's name), for he desires advice otherwise than from God, therefore from the devil, who is a rival with God. "*God denies me, therefore I come to thee. Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.*" — *If I fail with heaven, I will move hell.*

III. It is cold comfort which this evil spirit in Samuel's mantle gives to Saul, and is manifestly intended to drive him to despair and self-murder. Had it been the true Samuel, when Saul desired to be told what he should do he would have told him to repent and make his peace with God, and recal David from his banishment, and would then have told him that he might hope in this way to find mercy with God ; but, instead of that, he represents his case as helpless and hopeless, serving him as he did Judas, to whom he was first a tempter and then a tormentor, persuading him first to sell his master and then to hang himself. 1. He upbraids him with his present distress (v. 16), tells him, not only that God had departed from him, but that he had become his enemy, and therefore he must expect no comfortable answer from him : "*Wherefore dost thou ask me ?*" How can I be thy friend when God is thy enemy, or thy counsellor when he has left thee ?" 2. He upbraids him with the anointing of David to the kingdom, v. 17. He could not have touched upon a string that sounded more unpleasant in the ear of Saul than this. Nothing is said to reconcile him

to David, but all tends rather to exasperate him against David and widen the breach. Yet, to make him believe that he was Samuel, the apparition affirmed that it was God who spoke by him. The devil knows how to speak with an air of religion, and can teach *false apostles to transform themselves into the apostles of Christ* and imitate their language. Those who use spells and charms, and plead, in defence of them, that they find nothing in them but what is good, may remember what good words the devil here spoke, and yet with what a malicious design. 3. He upbraids him with his disobedience to the command of God in not destroying the Amalekites, v. 18. Satan had helped him to palliate and excuse that sin when Samuel was dealing with him to bring him to repentance, but now he aggravates it, to make him despair of God's mercy. See what those get that hearken to Satan's temptations. He himself will be their accuser, and insult over them. And see whom those resemble that allure others to that which is evil and reproach them for it when they have done. 4. He foretels his approaching ruin, v. 19. (1.) That his army should be routed by the Philistines. This is twice mentioned : *The Lord shall deliver Israel into the hand of the Philistines.* This he might foresee, by considering the superior strength and number of the Philistines, the weakness of the armies of Israel, Saul's terror, and especially God's departure from them. Yet, to personate a prophet, he very gravely ascribes it once and again to God : *The Lord shall do it.* (2.) That he and his sons should be slain in the battle : *To-morrow*, that is, in a little time (and, supposing that it was now after midnight, I see not but it may be taken strictly for the very next day after that which had now begun), *thou and thy sons shall be with me*, that is, in the state of the dead, separate from the body. Had this been the true Samuel, he could not have foretold the event unless God had revealed it to him ; and, though it were an evil spirit, God might by him foretel it ; as we read of an evil spirit that foresaw Ahab's fall at Ramoth-Gilead and was instrumental in it (1 Kings xxii. 20, &c.), as perhaps this evil spirit was, by the divine permission, in Saul's destruction. That evil spirit flattered Ahab, this frightened Saul, and both that they might fall ; so miserable are those that are under the power of Satan ; for, *whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest*, Prov. xxix. 9.

20 Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel : and there was no strength in him ; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night. 21 And the woman came unto Saul, and saw that he was sore troubled, and said unto him, Behold, thine handmaid

hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me. 22 Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thine handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way. 23 But he refused, and said, I will not eat. But his servants, together with the woman, compelled him; and he hearkened unto their voice. So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed. 24 And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted, and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof: 25 And she brought it before Saul, and before his servants; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night.

We are here told how Saul received this terrible message from the ghost he consulted. He desired to be told *what he should do* (v. 15), but was only told what he had not done and what should be done to him. Those that expect any good counsel or comfort otherwise than from God, and in the way of his institutions, will be as wretchedly disappointed as Saul here was. Observe,

I. How he sunk under the load, v. 20. He was indeed unfit to bear it, having *eaten nothing all the day before, nor that night*. He came fasting from the camp, and continued fasting; not for want of food, but for want of an appetite. The fear he was in of the power of the Philistines (v. 5) took away his appetite, or perhaps the struggle he had with his own conscience, after he had entertained the thought of consulting the witch, made him to nauseate even his necessary food, though ever so dainty. This made him an easy prey to this fresh terror that now came upon him like an armed man. *He fell all along on the earth*, as if the archers of the Philistines had already hit him, *and there was no strength in him* to bear up against these heavy tidings. Now he had enough of consulting witches, and found them miserable comforters. When God in his word speaks terror to sinners he opens to them, at the same time, a door of hope if they repent: but those that apply to the gates of hell for succour must there expect darkness without any glimpse of light.

II. With what difficulty he was persuaded to take so much relief as was necessary to carry him back to his post in the camp. The witch, it should seem, had left Saul alone with the spectre, to have his talk with him by himself; but perhaps hearing him fall and groan, and perceiving him to be in great

agony, she came to him (v. 21), and was very importunate with him to take some refreshment, that he might be able to get clear from her house, fearing that if he should be ill, especially if he should die there, she should be punished for it as a traitor, though she had escaped punishment as a witch. This, it is probable, rather than any sentiment of kindness, made her solicitous to help him. But what a deplorable condition had he brought himself to when he needed so wretched a comforter! 1. She showed herself very importunate with him to take some refreshment. She pleaded (v. 21) that she had obeyed his voice to the endangering of her life, and why therefore should not he hearken to her voice for the relieving of his life? v. 22. She had a fat calf at hand (and the word signifies one that was made use of in treading out the corn, and therefore could the worse be spared); this she prepared for his entertainment, v. 24. Josephus is large in applauding the extraordinary courtesy and liberality of this woman, and recommending what she did as an example of compassion to the distressed, and readiness to communicate for their relief, though we have no prospect of being recompensed. 2. He showed himself very averse to it: *He refused, and said, I will not eat* (v. 23), choosing rather to die obscurely by famine than honourably by the sword. Had he laboured only under a defect of animal spirits, food might have helped him; but, alas! his case was out of the reach of such succours. What are dainty meats to a wounded conscience? *As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart, so disagreeable and unwelcome*. 3. The woman at length, with the help of his servants, overpersuaded him, against his inclination and resolution, to take some refreshment. Not by force, but by friendly advice, they *compelled him* (v. 23), and of no other than such a rational and courteous compulsion are we to understand that in the parable, *Compel them to come in*, Luke xiv. 23. *How forcible are right words*, when men are pressed by them to that which is for their own interest! Job vi. 25. Saul was somewhat revived with this entertainment; so that he and his servants, when they had eaten, *rose up and went away* before it was light (v. 25), that they might hasten to their business and that they might not be seen to come out of such a scandalous house. Josephus here much admires the bravery and magnanimity of Saul, that, though he was assured he should lose both his life and honour, yet he would not desert his army, but resolutely returned to the camp, and stood ready for an engagement. I wonder more at the hardness of his heart, that he did not again apply to God by repentance and prayer, in hopes yet to obtain at least a reprieve; but he desperately ran headlong upon his own ruin. Perhaps, indeed, now that rage and envy possessed him to the uttermost, he was the better reconciled

to his hard fate, being told that his sons, and Jonathan among the rest, whom he hated for his affection to David, should die with him. If he must fall, he cared not what desolations of his family and kingdom accompanied his fall, hoping it would be the worse for his successor. Ἐμοῦ θανάτος γὰρ ἀμχθέρω πρῶτι.—*I care not if, when I am dead, the world should be set on fire.* He begged not, as David, "Let thy hand be against me, but not against thy people."

CHAP. XXIX.

How Saul, who was forsaken of God, when he was in a strait was more and more perplexed and embarrassed with his own counsels, we read in the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we find how David, who kept close to God, when he was in a strait was extricated and brought off by the providence of God, without any contrivance of his own. We have him, I. Marching with the Philistines, ver. 1, 2. II. Excepted against by the lords of the Philistines, ver. 3-5. III. Happily dismissed by Achish from that service which did so ill become him, and which yet he knew not how to decline, ver. 6-11.

**N**OW the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. 2 And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish. 3 Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day? 4 And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us; for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? 5 Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

Here is, I. The great strait that David was in, which we may suppose he himself was aware of, though we read not of his asking advice from God, nor of any project of his own to get clear of it. The two armies of the Philistines and the Israelites were encamped and ready to engage, v. 1. Achish, who had been kind to David, had obliged him to come himself and bring the forces he had into his service. David came accordingly, and, upon

a review of the army, was found with Achish, in the post assigned him in the rear, v. 2. Now, 1. If, when the armies engaged, he should retire, and quit his post, he would fall under the indelible reproach, not only of cowardice and treachery, but of base ingratitude to Achish, who had been his protector and benefactor and had reposed a confidence in him, and from whom he had received a very honourable commission. Such an unprincipled thing as this he could by no means persuade himself to do. 2. If he should, as was expected from him, fight for the Philistines against Israel, he would incur the imputation of being an enemy to the Israel of God and a traitor to his country, would make his own people hate him, and unanimously oppose his coming to the crown, as unworthy the name of an Israelite, much more the honour and trust of a king of Israel, when he had fought against them under the banner of the uncircumcised. If Saul should he killed (as it proved he was) in this engagement, the fault would be laid at David's door, as if he had killed him. So that on each side there seemed to be both sin and scandal. This was the strait he was in; and a great strait it was to a good man, greater to see sin before him than to see trouble. Into this strait he brought himself by his own unadvisedness, in quitting the land of Judah, and going among the uncircumcised. It is strange if those that associate themselves with wicked people, and grow intimate with them, come off without guilt, or grief, or both. What he himself proposed to do does not appear. Perhaps he designed to act only as keeper to the king's head, the post assigned him (ch. xxviii. 2) and not to do any thing offensively against Israel. But it would have been very hard to come so near the brink of sin and not to fall in. Therefore, though God might justly have left him in this difficulty, to chastise him for his folly, yet, because his heart was upright with him, he would not suffer him to be tempted above what he was able, but with the temptation made a way for him to escape, 1 Cor. x. 13.

II. A door opened for his deliverance out of this strait. God inclined the hearts of the princes of the Philistines to oppose his being employed in the battle, and to insist upon his being dismissed. Thus their enmity befriended him, when no friend he had was capable of doing him such a kindness. 1. It was a proper question which they asked, upon the mustering of the forces, "What do these Hebrews here?" v. 3. What confidence can we put in them, or what service can we expect from them?" A Hebrew is out of his place, and, if he has the spirit of a Hebrew, is out of his element, when he is in the camp of the Philistines, and deserves to be made uneasy there. David used to hate the congregation of evil doers, however he came now to be among them, Ps. xxvi. 5. It was an honourable testimony which Achish, on this

occasion, gave to David. He looked upon him as a refugee, that fled from a wrongful prosecution in his own country, and had put himself under his protection, whom therefore he was obliged, in justice, to take care of, and thought he might in prudence employ; "for (says he) he has been with me *these days, or these years,*" that is, a considerable time, many days at his court and a year or two in his country, and he never found any fault in him, nor saw any cause to distrust his fidelity, or to think any other than that he had heartily come over to him. By this it appears that David had conducted himself with a great deal of caution, and had prudently concealed the affection he still retained for his own people. We have need to *walk in wisdom towards those that are without, to keep our mouth when the wicked is before us,* and to be upon the reserve. 3. Yet the princes are peremptory in it, that he must be sent home; and they give good reasons for their insisting on it. (1.) Because he had been an old enemy to the Philistines; witness what was sung in honour of his triumphs over them: *Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands,* v. 5. "It will be a reproach to us to harbour and trust so noted a destroyer of our people; nor can it be thought that he will now act heartily against Saul who then acted so vigorously with him and for him." Who would be fond of popular praise or applause when, even that may, another time, be turned against a man to his reproach? (2.) Because he might be a most dangerous enemy to them, and do them more mischief than all Saul's army could (v. 4): "He may in the battle be an adversary to us, and surprise us with an attack in the rear, while their army charges us in the front; and we have reason to think he will do so, that, by betraying us, he may reconcile himself to his master. Who can trust a man who, besides his affection to his country, will think it his interest to be false to us?" It is dangerous to put confidence in a reconciled enemy.

6 Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favour thee not. 7 Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines. 8 And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight

against the enemies of my lord the king? 9 And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. 10 Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants that are come with thee: and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart. 11 So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

If the reasons Achish had to trust David were stronger than the reasons which the princes offered why they should distrust him (as I do not see that, in policy, they were, for the princes were certainly in the right), yet Achish was but one of five, though the chief, and the only one that had the title of king; accordingly, in a council of war held on this occasion, he was over-voted, and obliged to dismiss David, though he was extremely fond of him. Kings cannot always do as they would, nor have such as they would about them.

I. The discharge Achish gives him is very honourable, and not a final discharge, but only from the present service. 1. He signifies the great pleasure and satisfaction he had taken in him and in his conversation: *Thou art good in my sight as an angel of God,* v. 9. Wise and good men will gain respect, wherever they go, from all that know how to make a right estimate of persons and things, though of different professions in religion. What Achish says of David, God, by the prophet, says of the house of David (Zech. xii. 8), that it shall be as the angel of the Lord. But the former is a court-compliment; the latter is a divine promise. 2. He gives him a testimonial of his good behaviour, v. 6. It is very full and in obliging terms: "Thou hast been upright, and thy whole conduct has been good in my sight, and I have not found evil in thee." Saul would not have given him such a testimonial, though he had done far more service to him than Achish. God's people should behave themselves always so inoffensively as if possible to get the good word of all they have dealings with; and it is a debt we owe to those who have acquitted themselves well to give them the praise of it. 3. He lays all the blame of his dismission upon the princes, who would by no means suffer him to continue in the camp. "The king loves thee entirely, and would venture his life in thy hand; but the lords favour thee not, and we must not disoblige them, nor can we oppose them; therefore return and go in

peace." He had better part with his favourite than occasion a disgust among his generals and a mutiny in his army. Achish intimates a reason why they were uneasy. It was not so much for David's own sake as for the sake of his soldiers that attended him, whom he calls *his master's servants* (namely, Saul's), v. 10. They could trust him, but not them. (4.) He orders him to be gone early, as soon as it was light (v. 10), to prevent their further resentments, and the jealousies they would have been apt to conceive if he had lingered.

II. His reception of this discourse is very complimentary; but, I fear, not without some degree of dissimulation. "What?" says David, "must I leave *my lord the king*, whom I am bound by office to protect, just now when he is going to expose himself in the field? Why may not I go and *fight against the enemies of my lord the king*?" v. 8. He seemed anxious to serve him when he was at this juncture really anxious to leave him, but he was not willing that Achish should know that he was. No one knows how strong the temptation is to compliment and dissemble which those are in that attend great men, and how hard it is to avoid it.

III. God's providence ordered it wisely and graciously for him. For, besides that the snare was broken and he was delivered out of the dilemma to which he was first reduced, it proved a happy hastening of him to the relief of his own city, which sorely wanted him, though he did not know it. Thus the disgrace which the lords of the Philistines put upon him proved, in more ways than one, an advantage to him. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.* What he does with us we know not now, but we shall know hereafter, and shall see it was all for good.

## CHAP. XXX.

When David was dismissed from the army of the Philistines he did not go over to the camp of Israel, but, being expelled by Saul, observed an exact neutrality, and silently retired to his own city Ziklag, leaving the armies ready to engage. Now here we are told, 1. What a melancholy posture he found the city in, all laid waste by the Amalekites, and what distress it occasioned him and his men, ver. 1-6. II. What course he took to recover what he had lost. He enquired of God, and took out a commission from him (ver. 7, 8), pursued the enemy (ver. 9, 10), gained intelligence from a stragler (ver. 11-15), attacked and routed the plunderers (ver. 16, 17), and recovered all that they had carried off, ver. 18-20. III. What method he observed in the distribution of the spoil, ver. 21-31.

AND it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; 2 And had taken the women captives, that *were* therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried *them* away, and went on their way. 3 So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, *it was* burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their

daughters, were taken captives. 4 Then David and the people that *were* with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. 5 And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. 6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

Here we have, I. The descent which the Amalekites made upon Ziklag in David's absence, and the desolations they made there. They surprised the city when it was left unguarded, plundered it, burnt it, and carried all the women and children captives, v. 1, 2. They intended, by this, to revenge the like havoc that David had lately made of them and their country, *ch. xxvii. 8.* He that had made so many enemies ought not to have left his own concerns so naked and defenceless. Those that make bold with others must expect that others will make as bold with them and provide accordingly. Now observe in this, 1. The cruelty of Saul's pity (as it proved) in sparing the Amalekites; if he had utterly destroyed them, as he ought to have done, these would not have been in being to do this mischief. 2. How David was corrected for being so forward to go with the Philistines against Israel. God showed him that he had better have staid at home and looked after his own business. When we go abroad in the way of our duty we may comfortably hope that God will take care of our families in our absence, but not otherwise. 3. How wonderfully God inclined the hearts of these Amalekites to carry the women and children away captives, and not to kill them. When David invaded them he put all to the sword (*ch. xxvii. 9*), and no reason can be given why they did not retaliate upon this city, but that God restrained them; for he has all hearts in his hands, and says to the fury of the most cruel men, *Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further.* Whether they spared them to lead them in triumph, or to sell them, or to use them for slaves, God's hand must be acknowledged, who designed to make use of the Amalekites for the correction, not for the destruction, of the house of David.

II. The confusion and consternation that David and his men were in when they found their houses in ashes and their wives and children gone into captivity. Three days' march they had from the camp of the Philistines to Ziklag, and now that they came thither weary, but hoping to find rest in their houses and joy in their families, behold

a black and dismal scene was presented to them (v. 3), which made them all weep (David himself not excepted), though they were men of war, till they had no more power to weep, v. 4. The mention of David's wives, *Ahinoam and Abigail*, and their being carried captive, intimates that this circumstance went nearer his heart than any thing else. Note, It is no disparagement to the boldest and bravest spirits to lament the calamities of relations and friends. Observe, 1. This trouble came upon them when they were absent. It was the ancient policy of Amalek to take Israel at an advantage. 2. It met them at their return, and, for aught that appears, their own eyes gave them the first intelligence of it. Note, When we go abroad we cannot foresee what evil tidings may meet us when we come home again. The going out may be very cheerful, and yet the coming in be very doleful. *Boast not thyself therefore of to-morrow, nor of to-night either, for thou knowest not what a day, or a piece of a day, may bring forth*, Prov. xxvii. 1. If, when we come off a journey, we find our *tabernacles in peace*, and not laid waste as David here found his, let the Lord be praised for it.

III. The mutiny and murmuring of David's men against him (v. 6): *David was greatly distressed*, for, in the midst of all his losses, his own people spoke of stoning him, 1. Because they looked upon him as the occasion of their calamities, by the provocation he had given the Amalekites, and his indiscretion in leaving Ziklag without a garrison in it. Thus apt are we, when we are in trouble, to fly into a rage against those who are in any way the occasion of our trouble, while we overlook the divine providence, and have not that regard to the operations of God's hand in it which would silence our passions, and make us patient. 2. Because now they began to despair of that preferment which they had promised themselves in following David. They hoped ere this to have been all princes; and now to find themselves all beggars was such a disappointment to them as made them grow outrageous, and threaten the life of him on whom, under God, they had the greatest dependence. What absurdities will not ungoverned passions plunge men into? This was a sore trial to the man after God's own heart, and could not but go very near him. Saul had driven him from his country, the Philistines had driven him from their camp, the Amalekites had plundered his city, his wives were taken prisoners, and now, to complete his woe, his own familiar friends, in whom he trusted, whom he had sheltered, and who did eat of his bread, instead of sympathizing with him and offering him any relief, *lifted up the heel against him*, and threatened to stone him. Great faith must expect such severe exercises. But it is observable that David was reduced to this extremity just before his accession to the throne. At this very time,

perhaps, the stroke was struck which opened the door to his advancement. Things are sometimes at the worst with the church and people of God just before they begin to mend.

IV. David's pious dependence upon the divine providence and grace in this distress: *But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God*. His men fretted at their loss. *The soul of the people was bitter*, so the word is. Their own discontent and impatience added *wormwood and gall* to the affliction and misery, and made their ease doubly grievous. But 1. David bore it better, though he had more reason than any of them to lament it; they gave liberty to their passions, but he set his graces on work, and by encouraging himself in God, while they dispirited each other, he kept his spirit calm and sedate. Or, 2. There may be a reference to the threatening words his men gave out against him. *They spoke of stoning him*; but he, not offering to avenge the affront, nor terrified by their menaces, *encouraged himself in the Lord his God*, believed, and considered with application to his present case, the power and providence of God, his justice and goodness, the method he commonly takes of bringing low and then raising up, his care of his people that serve him and trust in him, and the particular promises he had made to him of bringing him safely to the throne; with these considerations he supported himself, not doubting but the present trouble would end well. Note, Those that have taken the Lord for their God may take encouragement from their relation to him in the worst of times. It is the duty and interest of all good people, whatever happens, to encourage themselves in God as their Lord and their God, assuring themselves that he can and will bring light out of darkness, peace out of trouble, and good out of evil, to all that love him and are *the called according to his purpose*, Rom. viii. 28. It was David's practice, and he had the comfort of it, *What time I am afraid I will trust in thee*. When he was at his wits' end he was not at his faith's end.

7 And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. 8 And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all. 9 So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind,



which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor. 11 And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; 12 And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. 13 And David said unto him, To whom *belongest* thou? and whence *art* thou? And he said, I *am* a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. 14 We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which *belongeth* to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire. 15 And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company. 16 And when he had brought him down, behold, *they were* spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. 17 And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled. 18 And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. 19 And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any *thing* that they had taken to them: David recovered all. 20 And David took all the flocks and the herds, *which* they drove before those *other* cattle, and said, This *is* David's spoil.

Solomon observes that *the righteous is delivered out of trouble and the wicked cometh in his stead, that the just falleth seven times*

*a-day and riseth again*; so it was with David. Many were his troubles, but *the Lord delivered him out of them all*, and particularly out of this of which we have here an account.

I. He enquired of the Lord both concerning his duty—*Shall I pursue after this troop?* and concerning the event—*Shall I overtake them?* v. 8. It was a great advantage to David that he had the high priest with him and the breast-plate of judgment, which, as a public person, he might consult in all his affairs, Num. xxvii. 21. We cannot think that he left Abiathar and the ephod at Ziklag, for then he and it would have been carried away by the Amalekites, unless we may suppose them hidden by a special providence, that they might be ready for David to consult at his return. If we conclude that David had his priest and ephod with him in the camp of the Philistines, it was certainly a great neglect in him that he did not enquire of the Lord by them concerning his engagement to Achish. Perhaps he was ashamed to own his religion so far among the uncircumcised; but now he begins to apprehend that this trouble is brought upon him to correct him for that oversight, and therefore the first thing he does is to call for the ephod. It is well if we get this good by our afflictions, to be reminded by them of neglected duties, and particularly to be quickened by them to enquire of the Lord. See 1 Chron. xv. 13. David had no room to doubt but that his war against these Amalekites was just, and he had an inclination strong enough to set upon them when it was for the recovery of that which was dearest to him in this world; and yet he would not go about it without asking counsel of God, thereby owning his dependence upon God and submission to him. If we thus, in all our ways, acknowledge God, we may expect that he will direct our steps, as he did David's here, answering him above what he asked, with an assurance that he should recover all.

II. He went himself in person, and took with him all the force he had, in pursuit of the Amalekites, v. 9, 10. See how quickly, how easily, how effectually the mutiny among the soldiers was quelled by his patience and faith. When they *spoke of stoning him* (v. 6), if he had spoken of hanging them, or had ordered that the ringleaders of the faction should immediately have their heads struck off, though it would have been just, yet it might have been of pernicious consequence to his interest in this critical juncture; and, while he and his men were contending, the Amalekites would have clearly carried off their spoil. But when he, as a deaf man, heard not, smothered his resentments, and *encouraged himself in the Lord his God*, the tumult of the people was stilled by his gentleness and the power of God on their hearts; and, being thus mildly treated,

they are now as ready to follow his foot as they were but a little before to fly in his face. Meekness is the security of any government. All his men were willing to go along with him in pursuit of the Amalekites, and he needed them all; but he was forced to drop a third part of them by the way; 200 out of 600 were so fatigued with their long march, and so sunk under the load of their grief, that they could not pass the brook Besor, but staid behind there. This was, 1. A great trial of David's faith, whether he could go on, in a dependence upon the word of God, when so many of his men failed him. When we are disappointed and discouraged in our expectations from second causes, then to go on with cheerfulness, confiding in the divine power, this is giving glory to God, by believing against hope, in hope. 2. A great instance of David's tenderness to his men, that he would by no means urge them beyond their strength, though the case itself was so very urgent. The Son of David thus considers the frame of his followers, who are not all alike strong and vigorous in their spiritual pursuits and conflicts; but, where we are weak, there he is kind; nay, more, there he is strong, 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

III. Providence threw one in their way that gave them intelligence of the enemy's motions, and guided theirs; a poor Egyptian lad, scarcely alive, is made instrumental of a great deal of good to David. *God chooses the foolish things of the world, with them to confound the wise.* Observe, 1. His master's cruelty to him. He had got out of him all the service he could, and when the lad fell sick, probably being over-toiled with his work, he barbarously left him to perish in the field, when he was in no such haste but he might have put him into some of the carriages, and brought him home, or, at least, have left him wherewithal to support himself. That master has the spirit of an Amalekite, not of an Israelite, that can thus use a servant worse than one would use a beast. *The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.* This Amalekite thought he should now have servants enough of the Israelite-captives, and therefore cared not what became of his Egyptian slave, but could willingly let him die in a ditch for want of necessaries, while he himself was eating and drinking, v. 16. Justly did Providence make this poor servant, that was thus basely abused, instrumental towards the destruction of a whole army of Amalekites and his master among the rest; for God hears the cry of oppressed servants. 2. David's compassion to him. Though he had reason to think he was one of those that had helped to destroy Ziklag, yet, finding him in distress, he generously relieved him, not only with bread and water (v. 11), but with figs and raisins, v. 12. Though the Israelites were in haste, and had no great plenty for themselves, yet they would not forbear to deliver one that was drawn unto

death, nor say, *Behold, we knew it not.* Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. Those are unworthy the name of Israelites who shut up the bowels of their compassion from persons in distress. It was also prudently done to relieve this Egyptian; for, though despicable, he was capable of doing them service: so it proved, though they were not certain of this when they relieved him. It is a good reason why we should neither do an injury nor deny a kindness to any man that we know not but, some time or other, it may be in his power to return either a kindness or an injury. 3. The intelligence David received from this poor Egyptian when he had come to himself. He gave him an account concerning his party. (1.) What they had done (v. 14): *We made an invasion, &c.* The countries which David had pretended to Achish to have made an incursion upon (ch. xxvii. 10) they really had invaded and laid waste. What was then false now proved too true. (2.) Whither they had gone, v. 15. This he promised David to inform him of upon condition he would spare his life and protect him from his master, who, if he could hear of him again (he thought), would add cruelty to cruelty. Such an opinion this poor Egyptian had of the obligation of an oath that he desired no greater security for his life than this: *Swear unto me by God*, not by the gods of Egypt or Amalek, but by the one supreme God.

IV. David, being directed to the place where they lay, securely celebrating their triumphs, fell upon them, and, as he used to pray, *saw his desire upon his enemies.* 1. The spoilers were cut off. The Amalekites, finding the booty was rich, and having got with it (as they thought) out of the reach of danger, were making themselves very merry with it, v. 16. All thoughts of war were laid aside, nor were they in any haste to house their prey, but *spread themselves abroad on the earth* in the most careless manner that could be, and there they were found eating, and drinking, and dancing, probably in honour of their idol-gods, to whom they gave the praise of their success. In this posture David surprised them, which made the conquest of them, and the blow he gave them, the more easy to him and the more dismal to them. Then are sinners nearest to ruin when they cry, *Peace and safety, and put the evil day far from them.* Nor does any thing give our spiritual enemies more advantage against us than sensuality and the indulgence of the flesh. *Eating, and drinking, and dancing,* have been the soft and pleasant way in which many have gone down to the congregation of the dead. Finding them thus off their guard, and from their arms (many of them, it may be, drunk, and unable to make any resistance), he put them all to the sword, and only 400 escaped, v. 17. Thus is the triumphing of the wicked short, and wrath comes on them, as on Belshazzar,

when they are in the midst of their jollity. 2. The spoil was recovered and brought off, and nothing was lost, but a great deal gotten. (1.) They retrieved all their own (v. 18, 19): *David rescued his two wives*; this is mentioned particularly, because this pleased David more than all the rest of his achievements. Providence had so ordered it that the Amalekites carefully preserved all that they had taken, concluding that they kept it for themselves, though really they preserved it for the right owners, so that there was nothing lacking to them; so it proved, when they concluded all was gone: so much better is God oftentimes to us than our own fears. Our Lord Jesus was indeed the Son of David and the Son of Abraham, in this resembling them both (Abraham, Gen. xiv. 16, and David here), that he *took the prey from the mighty, and led captivity captive*. But this was not all. (2.) They took all that belonged to the Amalekites besides (v. 20): *Flocks and herds*, either such as were taken from the Philistines and others, which David had the disposal of by the law of war; or perhaps he made a sally into the enemy's country, and fetched off these flocks and herds thence, as interest for his own. This drove was put in the van of the triumph, with this proclamation, "*This is David's spoil*." This we may thank him for." Those who lately spoke of stoning him now caressed him and cried him up, because they got by him more than they had then lost. Thus are the world and its sentiments governed by interest.

21 And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that *were* with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. 22 Then answered all the wicked men and *men* of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them *ought* of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead *them* away, and depart. 23 Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. 24 For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part *is* that goeth down to the battle, so *shall* his part *be* that carrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. 25 And it was

so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day. 26 And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, *even* to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD; 27 To *them* which *were* in Beth-el, and to *them* which *were* in south Ramoth, and to *them* which *were* in Jattir, 28 And to *them* which *were* in Aroer, and to *them* which *were* in Siphmoth, and to *them* which *were* in Eshtemoa, 29 And to *them* which *were* in Rachal, and to *them* which *were* in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to *them* which *were* in the cities of the Kenites, 30 And to *them* which *were* in Hormah, and to *them* which *were* in Chorashan, and to *them* which *were* in Athach, 31 And to *them* which *were* in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt.

We have here an account of the distribution of the spoil which was taken from the Amalekites. When the Amalekites had carried away a rich booty from the land of Judah and the Philistines they spent it in sensuality, in eating, and drinking, and making merry with it; but David disposed of the spoil taken after another manner, as one that knew that justice and charity must govern us in the use we make of whatever we have in this world. What God gives us he designs we should do good with, not serve our lusts with. In the distribution of the spoil,

I. David was just and kind to those who abode by the stuff. They came forth to meet the conquerors, and to congratulate them on this success, though they could not contribute to it (v. 21); for we should rejoice in a good work done, though Providence had laid us aside and rendered us incapable of lending a hand to it. David received their address very kindly, and was so far from upbraiding them with their weakness that he showed himself solicitous concerning them. He saluted them; *he asked them of peace* (so the word is), enquired how they did, because he had left them faint and not well; or wished them peace, bade them be of good cheer, they should lose nothing by staying behind; for of this they seemed afraid, as perhaps David saw by their countenances.

1. There were those that opposed their coming in to share in the spoil; some of David's soldiers, probably the same that spoke of stoning him, spoke now of defrauding

their brethren; they are called wicked men and men of Belial, v. 22. Let not the best of men think it strange if they have those attending them that are very bad and they cannot prevail to make them better. We may suppose that David had instructed his soldiers, and prayed with them, and yet there were many among them that were wicked men and men of Belial, often terrified with the apprehensions of death and yet wicked men still and men of Belial. These made a motion that the 200 men who abode by the stuff should only have their wives and children given them, but none of their goods. Well might they be called *wicked men*; for this bespeaks them, (1.) Very covetous themselves and greedy of gain; for hereby the more would fall to their share. Awhile ago they would gladly have given half their own to recover the other half, yet now that they have all their own they are not content unless they can have their brethren's too; so soon do men forget their low estate. All seek their own, and too often more than their own. (2.) Very barbarous to their brethren; for, to give them their wives and children, and not their estates, was to give them the mouths without the meat. What joy could they have of their families if they had nothing to maintain them with? Was this to do as they would be done by? Those are men of Belial indeed who delight in putting hardships upon their brethren, and care not who is starved, so they may be fed to the full.

2. David would by no means admit this, but ordered that those who tarried behind should come in for an equal share in the spoils with those that went to the battle, v. 23, 24. This he did, (1.) In gratitude to God. The spoil we have is that which God has given us; we have it from him, and therefore must use it under his direction as good stewards. Let this check us when we are tempted to misapply that which God has entrusted us with of this world's goods. "Nay, I must not do so with that which God has given me, not serve Satan and a base lust with those things which are not only the creatures of his power, but the gifts of his bounty. God has recompensed us by *delivering the company that came against us into our hand*, let not us then wrong our brethren. God has been kind to us in preserving us and giving us victory, let not us be unkind to them." God's mercy to us should make us merciful to one another.

(2.) In justice to them. It was true they tarried behind; but, [1.] It was not for want of good-will to the cause or to their brethren, but because they had not strength to keep up with them. It was not their fault, but their infelicity; and therefore they ought not to suffer for it. [2.] Though they tarried behind now, they had formerly engaged many times in battle and done their part as well as the best of their brethren, and their former ser-

vices must be considered now that there was something to enjoy. [3.] Even now they did good service, for they abode by the stuff, to guard that which somebody must take care of, else that might have fallen into the hands of some other enemy. Every post of service is not alike a post of honour, yet those that are in any way serviceable to the common interest, though in a meaner station, ought to share in the common advantages, as in the natural body every member has its use and therefore has its share of the nourishment. *First*, Thus David overruled the wicked men, and men of Belial, with reason, but with a great deal of mildness; for the force of reason is sufficient, without the force of passion. He calls them *his brethren*, v. 23. Superiors often lose their authority by haughtiness, but seldom by courtesy and condescension. *Secondly*, Thus he settled the matter for the time to come, made it a statute of his kingdom (a statute of distributions, *primo Davidis*—in the first year of David's reign), an ordinance of war (v. 25), that *as his part is that goes down to the battle*, and hazards his life in the high places of the field, so shall his be that guards the carriages. Abraham returned the spoils of Sodom to the right owners, and quitted his title to them *jure belli*—derived from the laws of war. If we help others to recover their right, we must not think that this alienates the property and makes it ours. God appointed that the spoil of Midian should be divided between the soldiers and the whole congregation, Num. xxxi. 27. The case here was somewhat different, but governed by the same general rule—that we are members one of another. The disciples, at first, *had all things common*, and we should still be ready to distribute, willing to communicate, 1 Tim. vi. 18. *When kings of armies did flee apace, she that tarried at home did divide the spoil*, Ps. lxxviii. 12.

11. David was generous and kind to all his friends. When he had given every one his own with interest there was a considerable overplus, which David, as general, had the disposal of; probably the spoil of the tents of the Amalekites consisted much in plate and jewels (Judg. viii. 24, 26), and these, because he thought they would but make his own soldiers proud and effeminate, he thought fit to make presents of to his friends, even the *elders of Judah*, v. 26. Several places are here named to which he sent of these presents, all of them in or near the tribe of Judah. The first place named is *Bethel*, which signifies *the house of God*; that place shall be first served for its name's sake; or perhaps it means not the city so called, but the place where the ark was, which was therefore *the house of God*. Thither David sent the first and best, to those that attended there, for his sake who is the first and best. *Hebron* is named last (v. 31), probably because thither he sent the residuum, which

was the largest share, having an eye upon that place as fittest for his head-quarters, 2 Sam. ii. 1. In David's sending these presents observe, 1. His generosity. He aimed not to enrich himself, but to serve his country; and therefore God afterwards enriched him, and set him to rule the country he had served. It becomes gracious souls to be generous. *There is that scatters, and yet increases.* 2. His gratitude. He sent presents to all the places where he and his men were wont to haunt (v. 31), that is, to all that he had received kindness from, that had sheltered him and sent him intelligence or provisions. Note, Honesty, as well as honour, obliges us to requite the favours that have been done us, or at least to make a real acknowledgment of them as far as is in the power of our hand. 3. His piety. He calls his present a *blessing*; for no present we give to our friends will be a comfort to them but as it is made so by the blessing of God: it intimates that his prayers for them accompanied his present. He also sent it out of the *spoil of the enemies of the Lord* (so he calls them, not his enemies), that they might rejoice in the victory for the Lord's sake, and might join with him in thanksgivings for it. 4. His policy. He sent these presents among his countrymen to engage them to be ready to appear for him upon his accession to the throne, which he now saw at hand. *A man's gift maketh room for him.* He was fit to be a king who thus showed the bounty and liberality of a king. Munificence recommends a man more than magnificence. The Ziphites had none of his presents, nor the men of Keilah; and thus he showed that, though he was such a saint as not to revenge affronts, yet he was not such a fool as not to take notice of them.

## CHAP. XXXI.

In the foregoing chapter we had David conquering, yea, more than a conqueror. In this chapter we have Saul conquered and worse than a captive. Providence ordered it that both these things should be doing just at the same time. The very same day, perhaps, that David was triumphing over the Amalekites, were the Philistines triumphing over Saul. One is set over against the other, that men may see what comes of trusting in God and what comes of forsaking him. We left Saul ready to engage the Philistines, with a shaking hand and an aching heart, having had his doom read him from hell, which he would not regard when it was read him from heaven. Let us now see what becomes of him. Here is, I. His army routed, ver. 1. II. His three sons slain, ver. 2. III. Himself wounded (ver. 3), and slain by his own hand, ver. 4. The death of his armour-bearer (ver. 5) and all his men, ver. 6. IV. His country possessed by the Philistines, ver. 7. His camp plundered, and his dead body deserted, ver. 8. His fall triumphed in, ver. 9. His body publicly exposed (ver. 10) and with difficulty rescued by the men of Jabesh-Gilead, ver. 11—13. Thus fell the man that was rejected of God.

**N**OW the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2 And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons. 3 And the battle went sore

against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. 4 Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. 5 And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. 6 So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together. 7 And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

The day of recompence has now come, in which Saul must account for the blood of the Amalekites which he had sinfully spared, and that of the priests which he had more sinfully spilt; that of David too, which he would have spilt, must come into the account. Now his day has come to fall, as David foresaw, when he should descend into battle and perish, *ch. xxvi. 10.* Come and see the *righteous judgments of God.*

I. He sees his soldiers fall about him, v. 1. Whether the Philistines were more numerous, better posted, and better led on, or what other advantages they had, we are not told; but it seems they were more vigorous, for they made the onset; they fought against Israel, and the Israelites fled and fell. The best of the troops were put into disorder, and multitudes slain, probably those whom Saul had employed in pursuing David. Thus those who had followed him and served him in his sin went before him in his fall and shared with him in his plagues.

II. He sees his sons fall before him. The victorious Philistines pressed most forcibly upon the king of Israel and those about him. His three sons were next him, it is probable, and they were all three slain before his face, to his great grief (for they were the hopes of his family) and to his great terror, for they were now the guard of his person, and he could conclude no other than that his own turn would come next. His sons are named (v. 2), and it grieves us to find Jonathan among them: that wise, valiant, good man, who was as much David's friend as Saul was his enemy, yet falls with the rest. Duty to his father would not permit him to stay at

home, or to retire when the armies engaged; and Providence so orders it that he falls in the common fate of his family, though he never involved himself in the guilt of it; so that the observation of Eliphaz does not hold (Job iv. 7), *Who ever perished being innocent?* For here was one. What shall we say to it?

1. God would hereby complete the vexation of Saul in his dying moments, and the judgment that was to be executed upon his house. If the family must fall, Jonathan, that is one of it, must fall with it. 2. He would hereby make David's way to the crown the more clear and open. For, though Jonathan himself would have cheerfully resigned all his title and interest to him (we have no reason to suspect any other), yet it is very probable that many of the people would have made use of his name for the support of the house of Saul, or at least would have come in but slowly to David. If Ishbosheth (who was now left at home as one unfit for action, and so escaped) had so many friends, what would Jonathan have had, who had been the darling of the people and had never forfeited their favour? Those that were so anxious to have a king like the nations would be zealous for the right line, especially if that threw the crown upon such a head as Jonathan's. This would have embarrassed David; and, if Jonathan could have prevailed to bring in all his interest to David, then it would have been said that Jonathan had made him king, whereas God was to have all the glory. *This is the Lord's doing.* So that though the death of Jonathan would be a great affliction to David, yet, by making him mindful of his own frailty, as well as by facilitating his accession to the throne, it would be an advantage to him. 3. God would hereby show us that the difference between good and bad is to be made in the other world, not in this. *All things come alike to all.* We cannot judge of the spiritual or eternal state of any by the manner of their death; for in that *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.*

III. He himself is sorely wounded by the Philistines and then slain by his own hand. The archers hit him (v. 3), so that he could neither fight nor fly, and therefore must inevitably fall into their hands. Thus, to make him the more miserable, destruction comes gradually upon him, and he dies so as to feel himself die. To such an extremity was he now reduced that, 1. He was desirous to die by the hand of his own servant rather than by the hand of the Philistines, lest they should abuse him as they had abused Samson. Miserable man! He finds himself lying, and all his care is to keep his body out of the hands of the Philistines, instead of being solicitous to resign his soul into the hands of God who gave it, Eccl. xii. 7. As he lived, so he died, proud and jealous, and a terror to himself and all about him. Those who rightly understand the matter think it

of small account, in comparison, how it is with them in death, so it may but be well with them after death. Those are in a deplorable condition indeed who, being *bitter in soul, long for death, but it cometh not* (Job iii. 20, 21), especially those who, despairing of the mercy of God, like Judas, leap into a hell before them, to escape a hell within them. 2. When he could not obtain that favour he became his own executioner, thinking hereby to avoid shame, but running upon a heinous sin, and with it entailing upon his own name a mark of perpetual infamy, as *felo de se—a self-murderer.* Jonathan, who received his death-wound from the hand of the Philistines and bravely yielded to the fate of war, died on the bed of honour; but Saul died as a fool dieth, as a coward dieth—a proud fool, a sneaking coward; he died as a man that had neither the fear of God nor hope in God, neither the reason of a man nor the religion of an Israelite, much less the dignity of a prince or the resolution of a soldier. Let us all pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation,* this temptation. His armour-bearer would not run him through, and he did well to refuse it; for no man's servant ought to be a slave to his master's lusts or passions of any kind. The reason given is that *he was sorely afraid,* not of death, for he himself ran wilfully upon that immediately; but, having a profound reverence for the king his master, he could not conquer that so far as to do him any hurt or perhaps he feared lest his trembling hand should give him but half a blow, and so put him to the greater misery.

IV. His armour-bearer who refused to kill him refused not to die with him, but *fell likewise upon his sword,* v. 5. This was an aggravating circumstance of the death of Saul, that, by the example of his wickedness in murdering himself, he drew in his servant to be guilty of the same wickedness, and *perished not alone in his iniquity.* The Jews say that Saul's armour-bearer was Doeg, whom he preferred to that dignity for killing the priests, and, if so, justly does his *violent dealing return on his own head.* David had foretold concerning him that God would *destroy him for ever,* Ps. lii. 5.

V. The country was put into such confusion by the rout of Saul's army that the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities (*on that side Jordan,* as it might be read) quitted them, and the Philistines, for a time, had possession of them, till things were settled in Israel (v. 7), to such a sad pass had Saul by his wickedness brought his country, which might have remained in the hands of the uncircumcised if David had not been raised up to repair the breaches of it. See what a king he proved for whom they rejected God and Samuel. They had still done wickedly (it is to be feared) as well as he, and therefore *were consumed both they and their king,* as the prophet had foretold

concerning them, *ch.* xii. 25. And to this reference is had long after. Hos. xiii. 10, 11, "*Where are thy saviours in all thy cities, of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath; that is, he was a plague to thee living and dying; thou couldst expect no other.*"

8 And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish *it in* the house of their idols, and among the people. 10 And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. 11 And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 13 And they took their bones, and buried *them* under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

The scripture makes no mention of the souls of Saul and his sons, what became of them after they were dead (secret things belong not to us), but of their bodies only.

I. How they were basely abused by the Philistines. The day after the battle, when they had recovered their fatigue, they came to strip the slain, and, among the rest, found the bodies of Saul and his three sons, *v.* 8. Saul's armour-bearer perhaps intended to honour his master by following the example of his self-murder, and to show thereby how well he loved him; but, if he had consulted his reason more than his passions, he would have spared that foolish compliment, not only in justice to his own life, but in kindness to his master, to whom, by the opportunity of survivorship, he might have done all the service that could be done him by any man after he was dead; for he might, in the night, have conveyed away his body, and those of his sons, and buried them decently. But such false and foolish notions these vain men have (though they would be wise) of giving and receiving honour. Nay, it should seem, Saul might have saved himself the fatal thrust and have made his escape: for the pursuers (in fear of whom he slew himself) came not to the place where he was till the next day. But whom God

will destroy he infatuates and utterly consumes with his terrors. See Job xviii. 5, & finding Saul's body (which now that it lay extended on the bloody turf was distinguishable from the rest by its length, as it was, while erect, by its height, when he proudly overlooked the surrounding crowd), they will, in that, triumph over Israel's crown, and meanly gratify a barbarous and brutish revenge by insulting the deserted corpse, which, when alive, they had stood in awe of. 1. They cut off his head. Had they designed in this to revenge the cutting off of Goliath's head they would rather have cut off the head of David, who did that execution, when he was in their country. They intended it, in general, for a reproach to Israel, who promised themselves that a crowned and anointed head would save them from the Philistines, and a particular reproach to Saul, who was taller by the head than other men (which perhaps he was wont to boast of), but was now shorter by the head. 2. They stripped him of his armour (*v.* 9), and sent that to be set up as a trophy of their victory, in the house of Ashtaroth their goddess (*v.* 10); and we are told, 1 Chron. x. 10 (though it is omitted here), that they fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. Thus did they ascribe the honour of their victory, not as they ought to have done to the real justice of the true God, but to the imaginary power of their false gods, and by this respect paid to pretended deities shame those who give not the praise of their achievements to the living God. Ashtaroth, the idol that Israel had many a time gone a whoring after, now triumphs over them. 3. They sent expresses throughout their country, and ordered public notice to be given in the houses of their gods of the victory they had obtained (*v.* 9), that public rejoicings might be made and thanks given to their gods. This David regretted sorely, 2 Sam. i. 20. *Tell it not in Gath.* 4. They fastened his body and the bodies of his sons (as appears, *v.* 12) to the wall of *Bethshan*, a city that lay not far from Gilboa and very near to the river Jordan. Hither the dead bodies were dragged and here hung up in chains, to be devoured by the birds of prey. Saul slew himself to avoid being abused by the Philistines, and never was royal corpse so abused as his was, perhaps the more if they understood that he slew himself for that reason. He that thinks to save his honour by sin will certainly lose it. See to what a height of insolence the Philistines had arrived just before David was raised up, who perfectly subdued them. Now that they had slain Saul and his sons they thought the land of Israel was their own for ever, but they soon found themselves deceived. When God has accomplished his whole work by them he will accomplish it upon them. See Isa. x. 6, 7.

II. How they were bravely rescued by the

men of Jabesh-Gilead. Little more than the river Jordan lay between Beth-shan and Jabesh-Gilead, and Jordan was in that place passable by its fords; a bold adventure was therefore made by the valiant men of that city, who in the night passed the river, took down the dead bodies, and gave them decent burial, *v.* 11, 13. This they did, 1. Out of a common concern for the honour of Israel, or the land of Israel, which ought not to be defiled by the exposing of any dead bodies, and especially of the crown of Israel, which was thus profaned by the uncircumcised. 2. Out of a particular sense of gratitude to Saul, for his zeal and forwardness to rescue them from the Ammonites when he first came to the throne, *ch.* xi. It is an evidence of a generous spirit and an encouragement to beneficence when the remembrance of kindnesses is thus retained, and they are thus returned in an extremity. The men of Jabesh-Gilead would have done Saul better service if they had sent their valiant men to him sooner, to strengthen him against the Philistines. But his day had come to fall, and now this is all the service they can do him, in honour to his memory. We find not that any general mourning was made for the death of Saul, as was for the death of Samuel (*ch.* xxv. 1), only those Gileadites of Jabesh did him honour at his death; for, (1.) They made a burning for the bodies, to perfume them.

So some understand the burning of them. They burnt spices over them, *v.* 12. And that it was usual thus to do honour to their deceased friends, at least their princes, appears by the account of Asa's funeral (2 Chron. xvi. 14), that *they made a very great burning for him.* Or (as some think) they burnt the flesh, because it began to putrefy. (2.) They buried the bodies, when, by burning over them, they had sweetened them (or, if they burnt them, they buried the bones and ashes), under a tree, which served for a grave-stone and monument. And, (3.) They fasted seven days, that is, each day of the seven they fasted till the evening; thus they lamented the death of Saul and the present distracted state of Israel, and perhaps joined prayers with their fasting for the re-establishment of their shattered state. Though, *when the wicked perish there is shouting* (that is, it is to be hoped a better state of things will ensue, which will be matter of joy), yet humanity obliges us to show a decent respect to dead bodies, especially those of princes.

This book began with the birth of Samuel, but now it ends with the burial of Saul, the comparing of which two together will teach us to prefer the honour that comes from God before any of the honours which this world pretends to have the disposal of.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE SECOND BOOK OF

## S A M U E L.

This book is the history of the reign of king David. We had in the foregoing book an account of his designation to the government, and his struggles with Saul, which ended at length in the death of his persecutor. This book begins with his accession to the throne, and is entirely taken up with the affairs of the government, during the forty years he reigned, and therefore is entitled by the LXX. *The Third Book of the Kings.* It gives us an account of David's triumphs and his troubles. I. His triumphs over the house of Saul (*ch.* i.—iv.), over the Jebusites and Philistines (*ch.* v.), at the bringing up of the ark (*ch.* vi. and vii.), over the neighbouring nations that opposed him (*ch.* viii. — x.); and so far the history is agreeable to what we might expect from David's character and the choice made of him. But his cloud has a dark side. II. We have his troubles, the causes of them, his sin in the matter of Uriah (*ch.* xi. and xii.), the troubles themselves from the sin of Amnon (*ch.* xiii.), the rebellion of Absalom (*ch.* xiv.—xix.) and of Sheba (*ch.* xx.), and the plague in Israel for his numbering the people (*ch.* xxiv.), besides the famine of the Gibeonites *ch.* xxi. His song we have (*ch.* xxii.), and his words and worthies, *ch.* xxiii. Many things in his history are very instructive; but for the hero who is the subject of it, though in many instances he appears here very great, and very good, and very much the favourite of heaven, yet it must be confessed that his honour shines brighter in his Psalms than in his Annals.



## CHAP. I.

In the close of the foregoing book (with which this is connected as a continuation of the same history) we had Saul's exit; he went down slain to the pit, though he was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. We are now to look towards the rising sun, and to enquire where David is, and what he is doing. In this chapter we have, I. Tidings brought him to Ziklag of the death of Saul and Jonathan, by an Amalekite, who undertook to give him a particular narrative of it, ver. 1—10. II. David's sorrowful reception of these tidings, ver. 11, 12. III. Justice done upon the messenger, who boasted that he had helped Saul to dispatch himself, ver. 13—16. IV. An elegy which David penned upon this occasion, ver. 17—27. And in all this David's breast appears very happily free from the sparks both of revenge and ambition, and he observes a very suitable demeanour.

**N**OW it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag; 2 It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. 3 And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. 4 And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. 5 And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? 6 And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. 7 And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. 8 And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. 9 He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. 10 So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

Here is, I. David settling again in Ziklag,

his own city, after he had rescued his family and friends out of the hands of the Amalekites (v. 1): He abode in Ziklag. Thence he was now sending presents to his friends (1 Sam. xxx. 26), and there he was ready to receive those that came into his interests; not men in distress and debt, as his first followers were, but persons of quality in their country, *mighty men, men of war, and captains of thousands* (as we find, 1 Chron. xii. 1, 8, 20); such came day by day to him, God stirring up their hearts to do so, till he had a *great host, like the host of God*, as it is said, 1 Chron. xii. 22. The secret springs of revolutions are unaccountable, and must be resolved into that Providence which turns all hearts as the rivers of water.

II. Intelligence brought him thither of the death of Saul. It was strange that he did not leave some spies about the camp, to bring him early notice of the issue of the engagement, a sign that he desired not Saul's woe-ful day, nor was impatient to come to the throne, but willing to wait till those tidings were brought to him which many a one would have sent more than half-way to meet. He that believes does not make haste, takes good news when it comes and is not uneasy while it is in the coming. 1. The messenger presents himself to David as an express, in the posture of a mourner for the deceased prince and a subject to the succeeding one. He came with his clothes rent, and made obeisance to David (v. 2), pleasing himself with the fancy that he had the honour to be the first that did him homage as his sovereign, but it proved he was the first that received from him sentence of death as his judge. He told David he came from the camp of Israel, and intimated the bad posture it was in when he said he had escaped out of it, having much ado to get away with his life, v. 3. 2. He gives him a general account of the issue of the battle. David was very desirous to know how the matter went, as one that had more reason than any to be concerned for the public; and he told him very distinctly that the army of Israel was routed, many slain, and, among the rest, Saul and Jonathan, v. 4. He named only Saul and Jonathan, because he knew David would be most solicitous to know their fate; for Saul was the man whom he most feared and Jonathan the man whom he most loved. 3. He gives him a more particular account of the death of Saul. It is probable that David had heard, by the report of others, what the issue of the war was, for multitudes resorted to him, it should seem, in consequence; but he was desirous to know the certainty of the report concerning Saul and Jonathan, either because he was not forward to believe it or because he would not proceed upon it to make his own claims till he was fully assured of it. He therefore asks, *How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan are dead?* in answer to which the young man

tells him a very ready story, putting it past doubt that Saul was dead, for he himself had been not only an eye-witness of his death, but an instrument of it, and therefore David might rely upon his testimony. He says nothing, in his narrative, of the death of Jonathan, knowing how ungrateful that would be to David, but accounts only for Saul, thinking (as David understood it well enough, *ch. iv. 10*) that he should be welcome for that, and rewarded as one that brought good tidings. The account he gives of this matter is, (1.) Very particular. That he happened to go to the place where Saul was (*v. 6*) as a passenger, not as a soldier, and therefore an indifferent person, that he found Saul endeavouring to run himself through with his own spear, none of his attendants being willing to do it for him; and, it seems, he could not do it dexterously for himself: his hand and heart failed him. The miserable man had not courage enough either to live or die; he therefore called this stranger to him (*v. 7*), enquired what countryman he was, for, provided he was not a Philistine, he would gladly receive from his hand the *coup de grace* (as the French call it concerning those that are broken on the wheel)—*the merciful stroke*, that might dispatch him out of his pain. Understanding that he was an Amalekite (neither one of his subjects nor one of his enemies), he begs this favour from him (*v. 9*): *Stand upon me, and slay me*. He is now sick of his dignity and willing to be trampled upon, sick of his life and willing to be slain. Who then would be inordinately fond of life or honour? The case may be such, even with those that have no hope in their death, that yet they may *desire to die, and death flee from them*, *Rev. ix. 6*. *Anguish has come upon me*; so we read it, as a complaint of the pain and terror his spirit was seized with. If his conscience now brought to mind the javelin he had cast at David, his pride, malice, and perfidiousness, and especially the murder of the priests, no marvel that anguish came upon him: moles (they say) open their eyes when they are dying. Sense of unpardoned guilt will make death indeed the king of terrors. Those that have baffled their convictions will perhaps, in their dying moments, be overpowered by them. The margin reads it as a complaint of the inconvenience of his clothes; that his coat of mail which he had for defence, or his embroidered coat which he had for ornament, hindered him, that he could not get the spear far enough into his body, or so straitened him, now that his body swelled with anguish, that he could not expire. Let no man's clothes be his pride, for it may so happen that they may be his burden and snare. "Hereupon," saith our young man, "*I stood upon him, and slew him*" (*v. 10*) at which word, perhaps, he observed David look upon him with some show of displeasure, and therefore he excuses himself in the next words:

"*For I was sure he could not live*; his life was whole in him indeed, but he would certainly have fallen into the hands of the Philistines or given himself another thrust." (2.) It is doubtful whether this story be true. If it be, the righteousness of God is to be observed, that Saul, who spared the Amalekites in contempt of the divine command, received his death's wound from an Amalekite. But most interpreters think that it was false, and that, though he might happen to be present, yet he was not assisting in the death of Saul, but told David so in expectation that he would reward him for it, as having done him a piece of good service. Those who would rejoice at the fall of an enemy are apt to measure others by themselves, and to think that they will do so too. But a man after God's own heart is not to be judged of by common men. I am not clear whether this young man's story was true or no: it may consist with the narrative in the chapter before, and be an addition to it, as Peter's account of the death of Judas (*Acts i. 18*) is to the narrative, *Matt. xxvii. 5*. What is there called a *sword* may here be called a *spear*, or when he fell upon his sword he leaned on his spear. (3.) However he produced that which was proof sufficient of the death of Saul, the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm. It should seem Saul was so foolishly fond of these as to wear them in the field of battle, which made him a fair mark for the archers, by distinguishing him from those about him; but as *pride* (we say) *feels no cold*, so it fears no danger, from that which gratifies it. These fell into the hands of this Amalekite. Saul spared the best of their spoil, and now the best of his came to one of that devoted nation. He brought them to David, as the rightful owner of them now that Saul was dead, not doubting but by his officiousness herein to recommend himself to the best preferments in his court or camp. The tradition of the Jews is that this Amalekite was the son of Doeg (for the Amalekites were descendants from Edom), and that Doeg, who they suppose was Saul's armour-bearer, before he slew himself gave Saul's crown and bracelet (the ensigns of his royalty) to his son, and bade him carry them to David, to curry favour with him. But this is a groundless conceit. Doeg's son, it is likely, was so well known to Saul that he needed not ask him as he did this Amalekite (*v. 8*), *Who art thou?* David had been long waiting for the crown, and now it was brought to him by an Amalekite. See how God can serve his own purposes of kindness to his people, even by designing (ill-designing) men, who aim at nothing but to set up themselves.

11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: 12 And they mourned, and wept, and

fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword. 13 And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. 14 And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's anointed? 15 And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. 16 And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD's anointed.

Here is, I. David's reception of these tidings. So far was he from falling into a transport of joy, as the Amalekite expected, that he fell into a passion of weeping, *rent his clothes* (v. 11), *mourned and fasted* (v. 12), not only for his people Israel and Jonathan his friend, but for Saul his enemy. This he did, not only as a man of honour, in observance of that decorum which forbids us to insult over those that are fallen, and requires us to attend our relations to the grave with respect, whatever we lost by their life or got by their death, but as a good man and a man of conscience, that had forgiven the injuries Saul had done him and bore him no malice. He knew it, before his son wrote it (Prov. xxiv. 17, 18), that if we rejoice when our enemy falls the Lord sees it, and it displeases him; and that he who is glad at calamities shall not go unpunished, Prov. xvii. 5. By this it appears that those passages in David's psalms which express his desire of, and triumph in, the ruin of his enemies, proceeded not from a spirit of revenge, nor any irregular passion, but from a holy zeal for the glory of God and the public good; for by what he did here, when he heard of Saul's death, we may perceive that his natural temper was very tender, and that he was kindly affected even to those that hated him. He was very sincere, no question, in his mourning for Saul, and it was not pretended, or a copy of his countenance only. His passion was so strong, on this occasion, that it moved those about him; *all that were with him*, at least in complaisance to him, *rent their clothes*, and they *fasted till even*, in token of their sorrow; and probably it was a religious fast: they humbled themselves under the hand of God, and prayed for the repairing of the breaches made upon Israel by this defeat.

II. The reward he gave to him that brought him the tidings. Instead of preferring him, he put him to death, judged

him out of his own mouth, as a murderer of his prince, and ordered him to be forthwith executed for the same. What a surprise was this to the messenger, who thought he should have favour shown him for his pains. In vain did he plead that he had Saul's order for it, that it was a real kindness to him, that he must inevitably have died; all those pleas are overruled: "*Thy mouth has testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed* (v. 16), therefore thou must die." Now,

1. David herein did not do unjustly. For, (1.) The man was an Amalekite. This, lest he should have mistaken it in his narrative, he made him own a second time, v. 13. That nation, and all that belonged to it, were doomed to destruction, so that, in slaying him, David did what his predecessor should have done and was rejected for not doing. (2.) He did himself confess the crime, so that the evidence was, by the consent of all laws, sufficient to convict him; for every man is presumed to make the best of himself. If he did as he said, he deserved to die for treason (v. 14), doing that which, it is probable, he heard Saul's own armour-bearer refuse to do; if not, yet by boasting that he had done it he plainly showed that if there had been occasion he would have done it, and would have made nothing of it; and, by boasting of it to David, he showed what opinion he had of him, that he would rejoice in it, as one altogether like himself, which was an intolerable affront to him who had himself once and again refused to *stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed*. And his lying to David, if indeed it was a lie, was highly criminal, and proved, as sooner or later that sin will prove, lying against his own head.

2. He did honourably and well. Hereby he demonstrated the sincerity of his grief, discouraged all others from thinking by doing the like to ingratiate themselves with him, and did that which might probably oblige the house of Saul and win upon them, and recommend him to the people as one that was zealous for public justice, without regard to his own private interest. We may learn from it that to give assistance to any in murdering themselves, directly or indirectly, if done wittingly, incurs the guilt of blood, and that the lives of princes ought to be, in a special manner, precious to us.

17 And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: 18 (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.) 19 The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! 20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the

daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. 21 Ye mountains of Gilboa, *let there be no dew, neither let there be rain*, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, *as though he had not been anointed with oil*. 22 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. 23 Saul and Jonathan *were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions*. 24 Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with *other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel*. 25 How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, *thou wast slain in thine high places*. 26 I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. 27 How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

When David had rent his clothes, mourned, and wept, and fasted, for the death of Saul, and done justice upon him who made himself guilty of it, one would think he had made full payment of the debt of honour he owed to his memory; yet this is not all: we have here a poem he wrote on that occasion; for he was a great master of his pen as well as of his sword. By this elegy he designed both to express his own sorrow for this great calamity and to impress the like on the minds of others, who ought to lay it to heart. The putting of lamentations into poems made them, 1. The more moving and affecting. The passion of the poet, or singer, is, by this way, wonderfully communicated to the readers and hearers. 2. The more lasting. Thus they were made, not only to spread far, but to continue long, from generation to generation. Those might gain information by poems that would not read history. Here we have,

1. The orders David gave with this elegy (r. 18): *He bade them teach the children of Judah (his own tribe, whatever others did) the use of the bow, either, 1. The bow used in war. Not but that the children of Judah knew how to use the bow (it was so commonly used in war, long before this, that the*

sword and bow were put for all weapons of war, Gen. xlvi. 22), but perhaps they had of late made more use of slings, as David in killing Goliath, because cheaper, and David would have them now to see the inconvenience of these (for it was the archers of the Philistines that bore so hard upon Saul, 1 Sam. xxxi. 3), and to return more generally to the use of the bow, to exercise themselves in this weapon, that they might be in a capacity to avenge the death of their prince upon the Philistines, and to outdo them at their own weapon. It was a pity but those that had such good heads and hearts as the children of Judah should be well armed. David hereby showed his authority over and concern for the armies of Israel, and set himself to rectify the errors of the former reign. But we find that the companies which had now come to David to Ziklag were armed with bows (1 Chron. xii. 2); therefore, 2. Some understand it either of some musical instrument called a *bow* (to which he would have the mournful ditties sung) or of the elegy itself. *He bade them teach the children of Judah Kesheth, the bow, that is, this song, which was so entitled for the sake of Jonathan's bow, the achievements of which are here celebrated. Moses commanded Israel to learn his song (Deut. xxxi. 19), so David his. Probably he bade the Levites teach them. It is written in the book of Jasher, there it was kept upon record, and thence transcribed into this history. That book was probably a collection of state-poems; what is said to be written in that book (Josh. x. 13) is also poetical, a fragment of an historical poem. Even songs would be forgotten and lost if they were not committed to writing, that best conservatory of knowledge.*

II. The elegy itself. It is not a divine hymn, nor given by inspiration of God to be used in divine service, nor is there any mention of God in it; but it is a human composition, and therefore was inserted, not in the book of Psalms (which, being of divine original, is preserved), but in the book of Jasher, which, being only a collection of common poems, is long since lost. This elegy proves David to have been,

1. A man of an excellent spirit, in four things:—

(1.) He was very generous to Saul, his sworn enemy. Saul was his father-in-law, his sovereign, and the anointed of the Lord: and therefore, though he had done him a great deal of wrong, David does not wreak his revenge upon his memory when he is in his grave; but like a good man, and a man of honour, [1.] He conceals his faults; and, though there was no preventing their appearance in his history, yet they should not appear in this elegy. Charity teaches us to make the best we can of every body and to say nothing of those of whom we can say no good, especially when they are gone. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum—Say nothing but good*

concerning the dead. We ought to deny ourselves the satisfaction of making personal reflections upon those who have been injurious to us, much more drawing their character thence, as if every man must of necessity be a bad man that has done ill by us. Let the corrupt part of the memory be buried with the corrupt part of the man—earth to earth, ashes to ashes; let the blemish be hidden and a veil drawn over the deformity. [2.] He celebrates that which was praiseworthy in him. He does not commend him for that which he was not, says nothing of his piety or fidelity. Those funeral commendations which are gathered out of the spoils of truth are not at all to the praise of those on whom they are bestowed, but very much the dispraise of those who unjustly misplace them. But he has this to say in honour of Saul himself, *First*, That he was *anointed with oil* (v. 21), the sacred oil, which signified his elevation to, and qualification for, the government. Whatever he was otherwise, the *crown of the anointing oil of his God was upon him*, as is said of the high priest (Lev. xxi. 12), and on that account he was to be honoured, because God, the fountain of honour, had honoured him. *Secondly*, That he was a man of war, a *mighty man* (v. 19—21), that he had often been victorious over the enemies of Israel and *vezed them whithersoever he turned*, 1 Sam. xiv. 47. His *sword returned not empty*, but satiated with blood and spoil, v. 22. His disgrace and fall at last must not make his former successes and services to be forgotten. Though his sun set under a cloud, time was when it shone brightly. *Thirdly*, That take him with Jonathan he was a man of a very agreeable temper, that recommended himself to the affections of his subjects (v. 23): *Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant*. Jonathan was always so, and Saul was so as long as he concurred with him. Take them together, and in the pursuit of the enemy, never were men more bold, more brave; they were *swifter than eagles and stronger than lions*. Observe, Those that were most fierce and fiery in the camp were no less sweet and lovely in the court, as amiable to the subject as they were formidable to the foe; a rare combination of softness and sharpness they had, which makes any man's temper very happy. It may be understood of the harmony and affection that for the most part subsisted between Saul and Jonathan: they were lovely and pleasant one to another, Jonathan a dutiful son, Saul an affectionate father; and therefore dear to each other in their lives, and *in their death they were not divided*, but kept close together in the stand they made against the Philistines, and fell together in the same cause. *Fourthly*, That he had enriched his country with the spoils of conquered nations, and introduced a more splendid attire. When they had a king like the nations, they must have clothes like the

nations; and herein he was, in a particular manner, obliging to his female subjects, v. 24. *The daughters of Israel he clothed in scarlet*, which was their delight.

(2.) He was very grateful to Jonathan, his sworn friend. Besides the tears he shed over him, and the encomiums he gives of him in common with Saul, he mentions him with some marks of distinction (v. 25): *O Jonathan! thou wast slain in thy high places!* which (compared with v. 19) intimates that he meant him by *the beauty of Israel*, which, he there says, was slain upon the high places. He laments Jonathan as his particular friend (v. 26): *My brother, Jonathan*; not so much because of what he would have been to him if he had lived, very serviceable no doubt in his advancement to the throne and instrumental to prevent those long struggles which, for want of his assistance, he had with the house of Saul (had this been the only ground of his grief it would have been selfish), but he lamented him for what he had been: *“Very pleasant host thou been unto me; but that pleasantness is now over, and I am distressed for thee.”* He had reason to say that Jonathan's love to him was wonderful; surely never was the like, for a man to love one who he knew was to take the crown over his head, and to be so faithful to his rival: this far surpassed the highest degree of conjugal affection and constancy. See here, [1.] That nothing is more delightful in this world than a true friend, that is wise and good, that kindly receives and returns our affection, and is faithful to us in all our true interests. [2.] That nothing is more distressful than the loss of such a friend; it is parting with a piece of one's self. It is the vanity of this world that what is most pleasant to us we are most liable to be distressed in. The more we love the more we grieve.

(3.) He was deeply concerned for the honour of God; for this is what he has an eye to when he fears lest *the daughters of the uncircumcised*, that are out of covenant with God, should triumph over Israel, and the God of Israel, v. 20. Good men are touched in a very sensible part by the reproaches of those that reproach God.

(4.) He was deeply concerned for the public welfare. It was the beauty of Israel that was slain (v. 19) and the honour of the public that was disgraced: *The mighty have fallen* (this is three times lamented, v. 19, 25, 27), and so the strength of the people is weakened. Public losses are most laid to heart by men of public spirit. David hoped God would make him instrumental to repair those losses and yet laments them.

2. A man of a fine imagination, as well as a wise and holy man. The expressions are all excellent, and calculated to work upon the passions. (1.) The embargo he would lay upon Fame is elegant (v. 20): *Tell it not in Gath*. It grieved him to the heart to think that it would be proclaimed in the

cities of the Philistines, and that they would insult over Israel upon it, and the more in remembrance of the triumphs of Israel over them formerly, when they sang, *Saul has slain his thousands*; for this would now be retorted. (2.) The curse he entails on the mountains of Gilboa, the theatre on which this tragedy was acted: *Let there be no dew upon you, nor fields of offerings, v. 21.* This is a poetical strain, like that of Job, *Let the day perish wherein I was born.* Not as if David wished that any part of the land of Israel might be barren, but, to express his sorrow for the thing, he speaks with a seeming indignation at the place. Observe, [1.] How the fruitfulness of the earth depends upon heaven. The worst thing he could wish to the mountains of Gilboa was barrenness and unprofitableness to man: those are miserable that are useless. It was the curse Christ pronounced on the fig-tree, *Never fruit grow on thee more, and that took effect*—the fig-tree withered away: this, on the mountains of Gilboa, did not. But, when he wished them barren, he wished there might be no rain upon them; and, if the heavens be brass, the earth will soon be iron. [2.] How the fruitfulness of the earth must therefore be devoted to heaven, which is intimated in his calling the fruitful fields *fields of offerings*. Those fruits of their land that were offered to God were the crown and glory of it: and therefore the failure of the offerings is the saddest consequent of the failure of the corn. See Joel i. 9. To want that wherewith we should honour God is worse than to want that wherewith we should sustain ourselves. This is the reproach David fastens upon the mountains of Gilboa, which, having been stained with royal blood, thereby forfeited celestial dews. In this elegy Saul had a more honourable interment than that which the men of Jabesh-Gilead gave him.

#### CHAP. II.

David had paid due respect to the memory of Saul his prince and Jonathan his friend, and what he did was as much his praise as theirs; he is now considering what is to be done next. Saul is dead, now therefore David arise. I. By direction from God he went up to Hebron, and was there anointed king, ver. 1—4. II. He returned thanks to the men of Jabesh-Gilead for burying Saul, ver. 5—7. III. Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, is set up in opposition to him, ver. 8—11. IV. A warm encounter happens between David's party and Ishbosheth's, in which, 1. Twelve of each side engaged hand to hand and were all slain, ver. 12—16. 2. Saul's party was beaten, ver. 17. 3. Asahel, on David's side, was slain by Abner, ver. 19—23. 4. Joab, at Abner's request, sounds a retreat, ver. 24—28. 5. Abner makes the best of his way (ver. 29), and the loss on both sides is computed, ver. 30—32. So that here we have an account of a civil war in Israel, which, in process of time, ended in the complete settlement of David on the throne.

**A**ND it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron. 2 So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess,

and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite. 3 And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. 4 And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul. 5 And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. 6 And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing. 7 Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.

When Saul and Jonathan were dead, though David knew himself anointed to be king, and now saw his way very clear, yet he did not immediately send messengers through all the coasts of Israel to summon all people to come in and swear allegiance to him, upon pain of death, but proceeded leisurely; for he that believeth doth not make haste, but waits God's time for the accomplishment of God's promises. Many had come in to his assistance from several tribes while he continued at Ziklag, as we find (1 Chron. xii. 1—22), and with such a force he might have come in by conquest. But he that will rule with meekness will not rise with violence. Observe here,

I. The direction he sought and had from God in this critical juncture, v. 1. He doubted not of success, yet he used proper means, both divine and human. Assurance of hope in God's promise will be so far from slackening that it will quicken pious endeavours. If I be elected to the crown of life, it does not follow, Then I will do nothing; but, Then I will do all that he directs me, and follow the guidance of him who chose me. This good use David made of his election, and so will all whom God has chosen. 1. David, according to the precept, *acknowledged God in his way.* He enquired of the Lord by the breast-plate of judgment, which Abiathar brought to him. We must apply to God not only when we are in distress, but even when the world smiles upon us and second causes work in favour of us. His enquiry was, *Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah? Shall I stir hence? Though*

Ziklag be in ruins, he will not quit it without direction from God. "If I stir hence, *Shall I go to one of the cities of Judah?*" not limiting God to them (if God should so direct him, he would go to any of the cities of Israel), but thus expressing his prudence (in the cities of Judah he would find most friends), and his modesty—he would look no further at present than his own tribe. In all our motions and removals it is comfortable to see God going before us; and we may, if by faith and prayer we set him before us.

2. God, according to the promise, directed his path, bade him go up, told him whither, unto Hebron, a priests' city, one of the cities of refuge, so it was to David, and an intimation that God himself would be to him a little sanctuary. The sepulchres of the patriarchs, adjoining to Hebron, would remind him of the ancient promise, on which God had caused him to hope. God sent him not to Bethlehem, his own city, because that was *little among the thousands of Judah* (Mic. v. 2), but to Hebron, a more considerable place, and which perhaps was then as the county-town of that tribe.

II. The care he took of his family and friends in his removal to Hebron. 1. He took his wives with him (v. 2), that, as they had been companions with him in tribulation, they might be so in the kingdom. It does not appear that as yet he had any children; his first was born in Hebron, *ch. iii. 2.* 2. He took his friends and followers with him, v. 3. They had accompanied him in his wanderings, and therefore, when he gained a settlement, they settled with him. Thus, if we *suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him*, 2 Tim. ii. 12. Nay, Christ does more for his good soldiers than David could do for his; David found lodging for them—*They dwell in the cities of Hebron*, the adjacent towns; but to those who *continue with Christ in his temptations he appoints a kingdom*, and will *feast them at his own table*, Luke xxii. 29, 30.

III. The honour done him by the men of Judah: They *anointed him king over the house of Judah*, v. 4. The tribe of Judah had often stood by itself more than any other of the tribes. In Saul's time it was numbered by itself as a distinct body (1 Sam. xv. 4) and those of this tribe had been accustomed to act separately. They did so now; yet they did it for themselves only; they did not pretend to anoint him king *over all Israel* (as Judg. ix. 22), but only *over the house of Judah*. The rest of the tribes might do as they pleased, but, as for them and their house, they would be ruled by him whom God had chosen. See how David rose gradually; he was first anointed king *in reversion*, then *in possession* of one tribe only, and at last of all the tribes. Thus the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is set up by degrees; he is Lord of all by divine designation, but *we see not yet all things put*

*under him*, Heb. ii. 8. David's reigning at first over the house of Judah only was a tacit intimation of Providence that his kingdom would in a short time be reduced to that again, as it was when the ten tribes revolted from his grandson; and it would be an encouragement to the godly kings of Judah that David himself at first reigned over Judah only.

IV. The respectful message he sent to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, to return them thanks for their kindness to Saul. Still he studies to honour the memory of his predecessor, and thereby to show that he was far from aiming at the crown from any principle of ambition or enmity to Saul, but purely because he was called of God to it. It was told him that the men of Jabesh-Gilead buried Saul, perhaps by some that thought he would be displeased at them as over-officious. But he was far from that. 1. He commends them for it, v. 5. According as our obligations were to love and honour any while they lived, we ought to show respect to their remains (that is, their bodies, names, and families) when they are dead. "Saul was your lord," says David, "and therefore you did well to show him this kindness and do him this honour." 2. He prays to God to bless them for it, and to recompense it to them: *Blessed are you*, and *blessed may you be of the Lord*, who will deal kindly with those in a particular manner that *dealt kindly with the dead*, as it is in Ruth i. 8. Due respect and affection shown to the bodies, names, and families of those that are dead, in conscience towards God, is a piece of charity which shall in no wise lose its reward: *The Lord show kindness and truth to you* (v. 6), that is, kindness according to the promise. What kindness God shows is in truth, what one may trust to. 3. He promises to make them amends for it: *I also will requite you*. He does not turn them over to God for a recompence that he may excuse himself from rewarding them. Good wishes are good things, and instances of gratitude, but they are too cheap to be rested in where there is an ability to do more. 4. He prudently takes this opportunity to gain them to his interest, v. 7. They had paid their last respects to Saul, and he would have them to be the last: "*The house of Judah have anointed me king*, and it will be your wisdom to concur with them and in that to be valiant." We must not so dote on the dead, how much soever we have valued them, as to neglect or despise the blessings we have in those that survive, whom God has raised up to us in their stead.

8 But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9 And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over

Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10 Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. 11 And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months. 12 And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 13 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. 14 And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise. 15 Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. 16 And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is in Gibeon. 17 And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

Here is, I. A rivalryship between two kings—David, whom God made king, and Ish-bosheth, whom Abner made king. One would have thought, when Saul was slain, and all his sons that had sense and spirit enough to take the field with him, David would come to the throne without any opposition, since all Israel knew, not only how he had signalized himself, but how manifestly God had designated him to it; but such a spirit of contradiction is there, in the devices of men, to the counsels of God, that such a weak and silly thing as Ishbosheth, who was not thought fit to go with his father to the battle, shall yet be thought fit to succeed him in the government, rather than David shall come peaceably to it. Herein David's kingdom was typical of the Messiah's, against which the heathens rage and the rulers take counsel, Ps. ii. 1, 2. 1. Abner was the person who set up Ishbosheth in competition with David, perhaps in his zeal for the lineal succession (since they must have a king like the nations, in this they must be like them, that the crown must descend from father to

son), or rather in his affection to his own family and relations (for he was Saul's uncle), and because he had no other way to secure to himself the post of honour he was in, as captain of the host. See how much mischief the pride and ambition of one man may be the occasion of. Ishbosheth would never have set up himself if Abner had not set him up, and made a tool of him to serve his own purposes. 2. Mahanaim, the place where he first made his claim, was on the other side Jordan, where it was thought David had the least interest, and being at a distance from his forces they might have time to strengthen themselves. But, having set up his standard there, the unthinking people of all the tribes of Israel (that is, the generality of them) submitted to him (r. 9), and Judah only was entirely for David. This was a further trial of the faith of David in the promise of God, and of his patience, whether he could wait God's time for the performance of that promise. 3. Some difficulty there is about the time of the continuance of this competition. David reigned about seven years over Judah only (r. 11), and yet (r. 10) Ishbosheth reigned over Israel but two years: before those two years, or after, or both, it was in general for the house of Saul (ch. iii. 6), and not any particular person of that house, that Abner declared. Or these two years he reigned before the war broke out (r. 12), which continued long, even the remaining five years, ch. iii. 1.

II. An encounter between their two armies.

1. It does not appear that either side brought their whole force into the field, for the slaughter was but small, v. 30, 31. We may wonder, (1.) That the men of Judah did not appear and act more vigorously for David, to reduce all the nation into obedience to him; but, it is likely, David would not suffer them to act offensively, choosing rather to wait till the thing would do itself or rather till God would do it for him, without the effusion of Israelitish blood; for to him, as a type of Christ, that was very precious, Ps. lxxii. 14. Even those that were his adversaries he looked upon as his subjects, and would treat them accordingly. (2.) That the men of Israel could in a manner stand neuter, and sit down tamely under Ishbosheth, for so many years, especially considering what characters many of the tribes displayed at this time (as we find, 1 Chron. xii. 23, &c.): *Wise men, mighty men, men of valour, expert in war*, and not of double heart, and yet for seven years together, for aught that appears, most of them seemed indifferent in whose hand the public administration was. Divine Providence serves its own purposes by the stupidity of men at some times and the activity of the same persons at other times; they are unlike themselves, and yet the motions of Providence are uniform.

2. In this battle Abner was the aggressor



David sat still to see how the matter would fall, but the house of Saul, and Abner at the head of it, gave the challenge, and they went by the worst. Therefore *go not forth hastily to strive*, nor be forward to begin quarrels, *lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof*, Prov. xxv. 8. A fool's lips and hands enter into contention.

3. The seat of the war was Gibeon. Abner chose it because it was in the lot of Benjamin, where Saul had the most friends; yet, since he offered battle, Joab, David's general, would not decline it, but there joined issue with him, and met him *by the pool of Gibeon*, v. 13. David's cause, being built upon God's promise, feared not the disadvantages of the ground. The pool between them gave both sides time to deliberate.

4. The engagement was at first proposed by Abner, and accepted by Joab, to be between twelve and twelve of a side. (1.) It should seem this trial of skill began in sport. Abner made the motion (v. 14): *Let the young men arise and play before us*, as gladiators. Perhaps Saul had used his men to these barbarous pastimes, like a tyrant indeed, and Abner had learnt of him to make a jest of wounds and death and divert himself with the scenes of blood and horror. He meant, "Let them *fight* before us," when he said, "Let them *play* before us." *Fools thus make a mock at sin*. But he is unworthy the name of a man that can be thus prodigal of human blood, that can thus *throw about firebrands, arrows, and death*, and say, *Am not I in sport?* Prov. xxvi. 18, 19. Joab, having been bred up under David, had so much wisdom as not to make such a proposal, yet had not resolution enough to resist and gainsay it when another made it; for he stood upon a point of honour, and thought it a blemish to his reputation to refuse a challenge, and therefore said, *Let them arise*; not that he was fond of the sport, or expected that the duels would be decisive, but he would not be hectored by his antagonist. How many precious lives have thus been sacrificed to the caprices of proud men! Twelve of each side were accordingly called out as champions to enter the lists, a double jury of life and death, not of others', but their own; and the champions on Abner's side seem to have been most forward, for they took the field first (v. 15), having perhaps been bred up in a foolish ambition thus to serve the humour of their commander-in-chief. But, (2.) However it began, it ended in blood (v. 16): *They thrust every man his sword into his fellow's side* (spurred on by honour, not by enmity); so they *fell down together*, that is, all the twenty-four were slain, such an equal match were they for one another, and so resolute, that neither side would either beg or give quarter; they did as it were by agreement (says *Josephus*) dispatch one another with mutual wounds. Those that strike at other men's lives often

throw away their own, and death only conquers and rides in triumph. The wonderful obstinacy of both sides was remembered in the name given to the place: *Helkath-hazzurim—the field of rocky men*, men that were not only strong in body, but of firm and unshaken constancy, that stirred not at the sight of death. Yet *the stout-hearted were spoiled, and slept their sleep*, Ps. lxxvi. 5. Poor honour for men to purchase at so vast an expense! Those that lose their lives for Christ shall find them.

5. The whole army at length engaged, and Abner's forces were routed, v. 17. The former was a drawn battle, in which all were killed on both sides, and therefore they must put it upon another trial, in which (as it often happens) those that gave the challenge went away with loss. David had God on his side; his side therefore was victorious.

18 And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe. 19 And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. 20 Then Abner looked behind him, and said, *Art thou Asahel?* And he answered, *I am*. 21 And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him. 22 And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother? 23 Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still. 24 Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon.

We have here the contest between Abner and Asahel. Asahel, the brother of Joab and cousin-german to David, was one of the principal commanders of David's forces, and was famous for swiftness in running: he was

as light of foot as a wild roe (v. 18); this he got the name of by swift pursuing, not swift tlying. Yet, we may suppose, he was not comparable to Abner as a skilful experienced soldier; we must therefore observe,

I. How rash he was in aiming to make Abner his prisoner. He pursued after him, and no other, v. 19. Proud of his relation to David and Joab, his own swiftness, and the success of his party, no less a trophy of victory would now serve the young warrior than Abner himself, either slain or bound, which he thought would put an end to the war and effectually open David's way to the throne. This made him very eager in the pursuit, and careless of the opportunities he had of seizing others in his way, on his right hand and on his left; his eye was on Abner only. The design was brave, had he been *par negotio*—equal to its accomplishment: but let not the swift man glory in his swiftness, any more than the strong man in his strength; *magnis excidit ausis*—he perished in an attempt too vast for him.

II. How generous Abner was in giving him notice of the danger he exposed himself to, and advising him not to meddle to his own hurt, 2 Chron. xxv. 19. 1. He bade him content himself with a less prey (v. 21): "*Lay hold of one of the young men, plunder him and make him thy prisoner, meddle with thy match, but pretend not to one who is so much superior to thee.*" It is wisdom in all contests to compare our own strength with that of our adversaries, and to take heed of being partial to ourselves in making the comparison, lest we prove in the issue *enemies to ourselves*, Luke xiv. 31. 2. He begged of him not to put him upon the necessity of slaying him in his own defence, which he was very loth to do, but must do rather than be slain by him, v. 22. Abner, it seems, either loved Joab or feared him; for he was very loth to incur his displeasure, which he would certainly do if he slew Asahel. It is commendable for enemies to be thus respectful one to another. Abner's care how he should lift up his face to Joab gives cause to suspect that he really believed David would have the kingdom at last, according to the divine designation, and then, in opposing him, he acted against his conscience.

III. How fatal Asahel's rashness was to him. He refused to turn aside, thinking that Abner spoke so courteously because he feared him; but what came of it? Abner, as soon as he came up to him, gave him his death's wound with a back stroke (v. 23): *He smote him with the hinder end of his spear, from which he feared no danger.* This was a pass which Asahel was not acquainted with, nor had learned to stand upon his guard against; but Abner, perhaps, had formerly used it, and done execution with it; and here it did effectual execution. Asahel died immediately of the wound. See here, I. How death often comes upon us by ways that we least suspect.

Who would fear the hand of a flying enemy or the butt-end of a spear? yet from these Asahel receives his death's wound. 2. How we are often betrayed by the accomplishments we are proud of. Asahel's swiftness, which he presumed so much upon, did him no kindness, but forwarded his fate, and with it he ran upon his death, instead of running from it. Asahel's fall was not only Abner's security from him, but put a full stop to the conqueror's pursuit and gave Abner time to rally again; for all that came to the place stood still, only Joab and Abishai, instead of being disheartened, were exasperated by it, pursued Abner with so much the more fury (v. 24), and overtook him at last about sunset, when the approaching night would oblige them to retire.

25 And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of a hill. 26 Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren? 27 And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother. 28 So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more. 29 And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim. 30 And Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. 31 But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and three-score men died. 32 And they took up Asahel, and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Beth-lehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day.

Here, I. Abner, being conquered, meanly begs for a cessation of arms. He rallied the remains of his forces on the top of a hill (v. 25), as if he would have made head again, but becomes a humble supplicant to Joab for a little breathing-time, v. 26. He that was

most forward to fight was the first that had enough of it. He that made a jest of bloodshed (*Let the young men arise and play before us, v. 14*) is now shocked at it, when he finds himself on the losing side, and the sword he made so light of drawing threatening to touch himself. Observe how his note is changed. Then it was but playing with the sword; now, *Shall the sword devour for ever?* It had devoured but one day, yet to him it seemed for ever, because it went against him; and very willing he is now that the sun should not go down upon the wrath. Now he can appeal to Joab himself concerning the miserable consequences of a civil war: *Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?* It will be reflected upon with regret when the account comes to be made up; for, whoever gets in a civil war, the community is sure to lose. Perhaps he refers to the bitterness that there was in the tribes of Israel, in the end of their war with Benjamin, when they wept sorely for the desolations which they themselves had made, *Judg. xxi. 2*. Now he begs of Joab to sound a retreat, and pleads that they were brethren, who ought not thus to bite and devour one another. He that in the morning would have Joab bid the people fall upon their brethren now would have him bid them lay down their arms. See here, 1. How easy it is for men to use reason when it makes for them who would not use it if it made against them. If Abner had been the conqueror, we should not have had him complaining of the voraciousness of the sword and the miseries of a civil war, nor pleading that both sides were brethren; but, finding himself beaten, all these reasonings are mustered up and improved for the securing of his retreat and the saving of his scattered troops from being cut off. 2. How the issue of things alters men's minds. The same thing which looked pleasant in the morning at night looked dismal. Those that are forward to enter into contention will perhaps repent it before they have done with it, and therefore had better leave it off before it be meddled with, as Solomon advises. It is true of every sin (O that men would consider it in time!) that it will be *bitterness in the latter end*. *At the last it bites like a serpent* those on whom it fawned.

II. Joab, though a conqueror, generously grants it, and sounds a retreat, knowing very well his master's mind and how averse he was to the shedding of blood. He does indeed justly upbraid Abner with his forwardness to engage, and lays the blame upon him that there had been so much bloodshed as there was (*v. 27*): "*Unless thou hadst spoken,*" that is, "hadst given orders to fight, hadst bidden the young men arise and play before us, none of us would have struck a stroke, nor drawn a sword against our brethren. Thou complainest that the sword devours, but who first unsheathed it? Who began?"

Now thou wouldst have the people parted, but remember who set them on to fight. We should have retired in the morning if thou hadst not given the challenge." Those that are forward to make mischief are commonly the first to complain of it. This might have served to excuse Joab if he had pushed on his victory, and made a full end of Abner's forces; but like one that pitied the mistake of his adversaries, and scorned to make an army of Israelites pay dearly for the folly of their commander, he very honourably, by sound of trumpet, put a stop to the pursuit (*v. 28*) and suffered Abner to make an orderly retreat. It is good husbandry to be sparing of blood. As the soldiers were here very obsequious to the general's orders, so he, no doubt, observed the instructions of his prince, who sought the welfare of all Israel and therefore not the hurt of any.

III. The armies being separated, both retired to the places whence they came, and both marched in the night, Abner to Mahanaim, on the other side Jordan (*v. 29*), and Joab to Hebron, where David was, *v. 32*. The slain on both sides are computed. On David's side only nineteen men were missing, besides Asahel (*v. 30*), who was worth more than all; on Abner's side 360, *v. 31*. In civil wars formerly great slaughters had been made (as *Judg. xii. 6, 20, 44*), in comparison with which this was nothing. It is to be hoped that they had grown wiser and more moderate. Asahel's funeral is here mentioned; the rest they buried in the field of battle, but he was carried to Bethlehem, and buried in the sepulchre of his father, *v. 32*. Thus are distinctions made between the dust of some and that of others; but in the resurrection no other difference will be made but that between godly and ungodly, which will remain for ever.

### CHAP. III.

The battle between Joab and Abner did not end the controversy between the two houses of Saul and David, but it is in this chapter working towards a period. Here is, I. The gradual advance of David's interest, *ver. 1*. II. The building up of his family, *ver. 2-5*. III. Abner's quarrel with Ish-bosheth, and his treaty with David, *ver. 6-12*. IV. The preliminaries settled, *ver. 13-16*. V. Abner's undertaking and attempt to bring Israel over to David, *ver. 17-21*. VI. The treacherous murder of Abner by Joab, when he was carrying on this matter, *ver. 22-27*. VII. David's great concern and trouble for the death of Abner, *ver. 28-33*.

**N**OW there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker. 2 And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; 3 And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maaeah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; 4 And the fourth, Adonijah the son

of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; 5 And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. 6 And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.

Here is, I. The struggle that David had with the house of Saul before his settlement in the throne was completed, v. 1. 1. Both sides contested. Saul's house, though beheaded and diminished, would not fall tamely. It is not strange that there was war between them, but one would wonder it should be a long war, when David's house had right on its side, and therefore God on its side; but, though truth and equity will triumph at last, God may for wise and holy ends prolong the conflict. The length of this war tried the faith and patience of David, and made his establishment at last the more welcome to him. 2. David's side got ground. The house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker. lost places, lost men, sunk in its reputation, grew less considerable, and was foiled in every engagement. But the house of David grew stronger and stronger. Many deserted the declining cause of Saul's house, and prudently came into David's interest, being convinced that he would certainly win the day. The contest between grace and corruption in the hearts of believers, who are sanctified but in part, may fitly be compared to this recorded here. There is a long war between them, the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; but, as the work of sanctification is carried on, corruption, like the house of Saul, grows weaker and weaker; while grace, like the house of David, grows stronger and stronger, till it come to a perfect man, and judgment be brought forth unto victory.

II. The increase of his own house. Here is an account of six sons he had by six several wives, in the seven years he reigned in Hebron. Perhaps this is here mentioned as that which strengthened David's interest. Every child, whose welfare was embarked in the common safety, was a fresh security given to the commonwealth for his care of it. He that has his quiver filled with these arrows shall speak with his enemy in the gate, Ps. cxxvii. 5. As the death of Saul's sons weakened his interest, so the birth of David's strengthened his. 1. It was David's fault thus to multiply wives, contrary to the law (Deut. xvii. 17), and it was a bad example to his successors. 2. It does not appear that in these seven years he had above one son by each of these wives; some have had as numerous a progeny, and with much more honour and comfort, by one wife. 3. We read not that any of these sons came to be

famous (three of them were infamous, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah); we have therefore reason to rejoice with trembling in the building up of our families. 4. His son by Abigail is called *Chileab* (v. 3), whereas (1 Chron. iii. 1) he is called *Daniel*. Bishop Patrick mentions the reason which the Hebrew doctors give for these names, that his first name was *Daniel*—*God has judged me* (namely, against Nabal), but David's enemies reproached him, and said, "It is Nabal's son, and not David's," to confute which calumny Providence so ordered it that, as he grew up, he became, in his countenance and features, extremely like David, and resembled him more than any of his children, upon which he gave him the name of *Chileub*, which signifies, *like his father*, or the father's picture. 5. Absalom's mother is said to be the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur, a heathen prince. Perhaps David thereby hoped to strengthen his interest, but the issue of the marriage was one that proved his grief and shame. 6. The last is called *David's wife*, which therefore, some think, was Michal, his first and most rightful wife, called here by another name: and, though she had no child after she mocked David, she might have had before.

Thus was David's house strengthened; but it was Abner that *made himself strong for the house of Saul*, which is mentioned (v. 6) to show that, if he failed them, they would fall of course.

7 And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine? 8 Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ishbosheth, and said, *Am I a dog's head*, which against Judah do show kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman? 9 So do God to Abner, and more also, except as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; 10 To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba. 11 And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him. 12 And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, *Whose is the land?* saying also, *Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee,*

to bring about all Israel unto thee. 13 And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face. 14 And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver *me* my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. 15 And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from *her* husband, *even* from Phaltiel the son of Laish. 16 And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned. 17 And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past *to be* king over you: 18 Now then do *it*: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies. 19 And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin. 20 So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that *were* with him a feast. 21 And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace.

Here, I. Abner breaks with Ish-bosheth, and deserts his interest, upon a little provocation which Ish-bosheth unadvisedly gave him. God can serve his own purposes by the sins and follies of men. 1. Ish-bosheth accused Abner of no less a crime than debauching one of his father's concubines, *v. 7*. Whether it was so or no does not appear, nor what ground he had for the suspicion: but, however it was, it would have been Ish-bosheth's prudence to be silent, considering how much it was his interest not to disoblige Abner. If the thing was false, and his

jealousy groundless, it was very disingenuous and ungrateful to entertain unjust surmises of one who had ventured his all for him, and was certainly the best friend he had in the world. 2. Abner resented the charge very strongly. Whether he was guilty of the *fault concerning this woman* or no he does not say (*v. 8*), but we suspect he was guilty, for he does not expressly deny it; and, though he was, he lets Ish-bosheth know, (1.) That he scorned to be reproached with it by him, and would not take reproof at his hands. "What!" says Abner, "*Am I a dog's head*, a vile and contemptible animal, that thou exposest me thus? *v. 8*. Is this my recompence for the kindness I have shown to thee and thy father's house, and the good services I have done you?" He magnifies the service with this, that it was against Judah, the tribe on which the crown was settled, and which would certainly have it at last, so that, in supporting the house of Saul, he acted both against his conscience and against his interest, for which he deserved a better requital than this: and yet, perhaps, he would not have been so zealous for the house of Saul if he had not thereby gratified his own ambition and hoped to find his own account in it. Note, Proud men will not bear to be reprov'd, especially by those whom they think they have oblig'd. (2.) That he would certainly be revenged on him, *v. 9, 10*. With the utmost degree of arrogance and insolence he lets him know that, as he had raised him up, so he could pull him down again and would do it. He knew that God had sworn to David to give him the kingdom, and yet oppos'd it with all his might from a principle of ambition; but now he complies with it from a principle of revenge, under colour of some regard to the will of God, which was but a pretence. Those that are slaves to their lusts have many masters, which drive, some one way and some another, and, according as they make head, men are violently hurried into self-contradictions. Abner's ambition made him zealous for Ish-bosheth, and now his revenge made him as zealous for David. If he had sincerely regarded God's promise to David, and acted with an eye to that, he would have been steady and uniform in his counsels, and acted in consistency with himself. But, while Abner serves his own lusts, God by him serves his own purposes, makes even his wrath and revenge to praise him, and ordains strength to David by it. *Lastly*, See how Ish-bosheth was thunder-struck by Abner's insolence: *He could not answer him again, v. 11*. If Ish-bosheth had had the spirit of a man, especially of a prince, he might have answered him that his merits were the aggravation of his crimes, that he would not be served by so base a man, and doubted not but to do well enough without him. But he was conscious to himself of his own weakness, and therefore said not a

word, lest he should make bad worse. His heart failed him, and he now became, as David had foretold concerning his enemies, like a bowing wall and a tottering fence, Ps. lxii. 3.

II. Abner treats with David. We must suppose that he began to grow weary of Ish-bosheth's cause, and sought an opportunity to desert it, or else, however he might threaten Ish-bosheth with it, for the quashing of the charge against himself, he would not have made good his angry words so soon as he did, v. 12. He sent messengers to David, to tell him that he was at his service. "Whose is the land? Is it not thine? For thou hast the best title to the government and the best interest in the people's affections." Note, God can find out ways to make those serviceable to the kingdom of Christ who yet have no sincere affection for it and who have vigorously set themselves against it. Enemies are sometimes made a footstool, not only to be trodden upon, but to ascend by. The earth helped the woman.

III. David enters into a treaty with Abner, but upon condition that he shall procure him the restitution of Michal his wife, v. 13. Hereby, 1. David showed the sincerity of his conjugal affection to his first and most rightful wife; neither her marrying another, nor his, had alienated him from her. Many waters could not quench that love. 2. He testified his respect to the house of Saul. So far was he from trampling upon it, now that it was fallen, that even in his elevation he valued himself not a little on his relation to it. He cannot be pleased with the honours of the throne unless he have Michal, Saul's daughter, to share with him in them, so far is he from bearing any malice to the family of his enemy. Abner sent him word that he must apply to Ish-bosheth, which he did (v. 14), pleading that he had purchased her at a dear rate, and she was wrongfully taken from him. Ish-bosheth durst not deny his demand, now that he had not Abner to stand by him, but took her from Phaltiel, to whom Saul had married her (v. 15), and Abner conducted her to David, not doubting but that then he should be doubly welcome when he brought him a wife in one hand and a crown in the other. Her latter husband was loth to part with her, and followed her weeping (v. 16), but there was no remedy: he must thank himself; for when he took her he knew that another had a right to her. Usurpers must expect to resign. Let no man therefore set his heart on that to which he is not entitled. If any disagreement has separated husband and wife, as they expect the blessing of God let them be reconciled, and come together again; let all former quarrels be forgotten, and let them live together in love, according to God's holy ordinance.

IV. Abner uses his interest with the elders of Israel to bring them over to David, knowing that whichever way they went the com-

mon people would follow of course. Now that it serves his own turn he can plead in David's behalf that he was, 1. Israel's choice (v. 17): "You sought for him in times past to be king over you, when he had signalized himself in so many engagements with the Philistines and done you so much good service; no man can pretend to greater personal merit than David nor to less than Ish-bosheth. You have tried them both, *Detur digniori—Give the crown to him that best deserves it.* Let David be your king." 2. God's choice (v. 18): "The Lord hath spoken of David. Compare v. 9. When God appointed Samuel to anoint him he did, in effect, promise that by his hand he would save Israel; for for that end he was made king. God having promised, by David's hand, to save Israel, it is both your duty, in compliance with God's will, and your interest, in order to your victories over your enemies, to submit to him; and it is the greatest folly in the world to oppose him." Who would have expected such reasonings as these out of Abner's mouth? But thus God will make the enemies of his people to know and own that he has loved them, Rev. iii. 9. He particularly applied to the men of Benjamin, those of his own tribe, on whom he had the greatest influence, and whom he had drawn in to appear for the house of Saul. He was the man that had deceived them, and therefore he was concerned to undeceive them. Thus the multitude are as they are managed.

V. David concludes the treaty with Abner; and he did wisely and well therein; for, whatever induced Abner to it, it was a good work to put an end to the war, and to settle the Lord's anointed on the throne; and it was as lawful for David to make use of his agency as it is for a poor man to receive alms from a Pharisee, who gives it in pride and hypocrisy. Abner reported to David the sense of the people and the success of his communications with them, v. 19. He came now, not as at first privately, but with a retinue of twenty men, and David entertained them with a feast (v. 20) in token of reconciliation and joy and as a pledge of the agreement between them: it was a feast upon a covenant, like that, Gen. xxvi. 30. *If thy enemy hunger, feed him*; but, if he submit, feast him. Abner, pleased with his entertainment, the prevention of his fall with Saul's house (which would have been inevitable if he had not taken this course), and much more with the prospect he had of preferment under David, undertakes in a little time to perfect the revolution, and to bring all Israel into obedience to David, v. 21. He tells David he shall reign over all that his heart desired. He knew David's elevation took rise from God's appointment, yet he insinuates that it sprang from his own ambition and desire of rule; thus (as bad men often do) he measured that good man by himself. However, David and he parted very good friends.

and the affair between them was well settled. Thus it behoves all who fear God and keep his commandments to avoid strife, even with the wicked, to live at peace with all men, and to show the world that they are children of the light.

22 And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from *pursuing* a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner *was* not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the host that *was* with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace. 24 Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it *that* thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? 25 Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest. 26 And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew *it* not. 27 And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth *rib*, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. 28 And afterward when David heard *it*, he said, I and my kingdom *are* guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner: 29 Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread. 30 So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle. 31 And David said to Joab, and to all the people that *were* with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David *himself* followed the bier. 32 And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his

voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept. 33 And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? 34 Thy hands *were* not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, *so* fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him. 35 And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or aught else, till the sun be down. 36 And all the people took notice *of it*, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. 37 For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner. 38 And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? 39 And I *am* this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruah *be* too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.

We have here an account of the murder of Abner by Joab, and David's deep resentment of it.

I. Joab very insolently fell foul upon David for treating with Abner. He happened to be abroad upon service when Abner was with David, pursuing a troop, either of Philistines or of Saul's party; but, upon his return, he was informed that Abner was just gone (v. 22, 23), and that a great many kind things had passed between David and him. He had all the reason in the world to be satisfied of David's prudence and to acquiesce in the measures he took, knowing him to be a wise and good man himself and under a divine conduct in all his affairs; and yet, as if he had the same sway in David's cause that Abner had in Ish-bosheth's, he chides David, and reproaches him to his face as impolitic (v. 24, 25): *What hast thou done?* As if David were accountable to him for what he did: "*Why hast thou sent him away,* when thou mightest have made him a prisoner? He came as a spy, and will certainly betray thee." I know not whether to wonder more that Joab had impudence enough to give such an affront to his prince or that David had patience enough to take it. He does, in effect, call David *a fool* when he tells him he knew Abner came to deceive him and yet he trusted him. We find no answer that David gave him, not because he

feared him, as Ish-bosheth did Abner (v. 11), but because he despised him, or because Joab had not so much good manners as to stay for an answer.

II. He very treacherously sent for Abner back, and, under colour of a private conference with him, barbarously killed him with his own hand. That he made use of David's name, under pretence of giving him some further instructions, is intimated in that, *but David knew it not*, v. 26. Abner, designing no harm, feared none, but very innocently returned to Hebron, and, when he found Joab waiting for him at the gate, turned aside with him to speak with him privately, forgetting what he himself had said when he slew Asahel, *How shall I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?* (ch. ii. 22), and there Joab murdered him (v. 27), and it is intimated (v. 30) that Abishai was privy to the design, and was aiding and abetting, and would have come in to his brother's assistance if there had been occasion; he is therefore charged as an accessory: *Joab and Abishai slew Abner*, though perhaps he only knew it who is privy to the thoughts and intents of men's hearts. Now in this, 1. It is certain that the Lord was righteous. Abner had maliciously, and against the convictions of his conscience, opposed David. He had now basely deserted Ish-bosheth, and betrayed him, under pretence of regard to God and Israel, but really from a principle of pride, and revenge, and impatience of control. God will not therefore use so bad a man, though David might, in so good a work as the uniting of Israel. Judgments are prepared for such scorners as Abner was. But, 2. It is as certain that Joab was unrighteous, and, in what he did, did wickedly. David was a man after God's own heart, but could not have those about him, no, not in places of the greatest trust, after his own heart. Many a good prince, and a good master, has been forced to employ bad men. (1.) Even the pretence for doing this was very unjust. Abner had indeed slain his brother Asahel, and Joab and Abishai pretended herein to be the avengers of his blood (v. 27, 30); but Abner slew Asahel in an open war, wherein Abner indeed had given the challenge, but Joab himself had accepted it and had slain many of Abner's friends. He did it likewise in his own defence, and not till he had given him fair warning (which he would not take), and he did it with reluctancy; but Joab here shed *the blood of war in peace*, 1 Kings ii. 5. (2.) That which we have reason to think was at the bottom of Joab's enmity to Abner made it much worse. Joab was now general of David's forces; but, if Abner should come into his interest, he would possibly be preferred before him, being a senior officer, and more experienced in the art of war. This Joab was jealous of, and could better bear the guilt of blood than the thoughts of a

rival. (3.) He did it treacherously, and under pretence of speaking peaceably to him, Deut. xxvii. 24. Had he challenged him, he would have done like a soldier; but to assassinate him was done villainously and like a coward. *His words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords*, Ps. lv. 21. Thus he basely slew Amasa, ch. xx. 9, 10. (4.) The doing of it was a great affront and injury to David, who was now in treaty with Abner, as Joab knew. Abner was now actually in his master's service, so that, through his side, he struck at David himself. (5.) It was a great aggravation of the murder that he did it in the gate, openly and avowedly, as one that was not ashamed, nor could blush. The gate was the place of judgment and the place of concourse, so that he did it in defiance of justice, both the just sentence of the magistrates and the just resentment of the crowd, as one that neither feared God nor regarded man, but thought himself above all control: and Hebron was a Levites' city and a city of refuge.

III. David laid deeply to heart and in many ways expressed his detestation of this execrable villainy.

1. He washed his hands from the guilt of Abner's blood. Lest any should suspect that Joab had some secret intimation from David to do as he did (and the rather because he went so long unpunished), he here solemnly appeals to God concerning his innocency: *I and my kingdom are guiltless* (and my kingdom is so because I am so) *before the Lord for ever*, v. 28. It is a comfort to be able to say, when any bad thing is done, that we had no hand in it. *We have not shed this blood*, Deut. xxi. 7. However we may be censured or suspected, *our hearts shall not reproach us*.

2. He entailed the curse for it upon Joab and his family (v. 29): *Let it rest on the head of Joab*. Let the blood cry against him, and let divine vengeance follow him. Let the iniquity be visited upon his children and children's children, in some hereditary disease or other. The longer the punishment is delayed, the longer let it last when it shall come. Let his posterity be stigmatized, blemished with an issue or a leprosy, which will shut them out from society; let them be beggars, or cripples, or come to some untimely end, that it may be said, He is one of Joab's race." This intimates that the guilt of blood brings a curse upon families; if men do not avenge it, God will, and will lay up the iniquity for the children. But methinks a resolute punishment of the murderer himself would better have become David than this passionate imprecation of God's judgments upon his posterity.

3. He called upon all about him, even Joab himself, to lament the death of Abner (v. 31): *Rend your clothes and mourn before Abner*, that is, before the hearse of Abner, as Abraham is said to mourn *before his dead* (Gen.



xxiii. 2, 3), and he gives a reason why they should attend his funeral with sincere and solemn mourning (v. 38), because there is a *prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel*. His alliance to Saul, his place as general, his interest, and the great services he had formerly done, were enough to denominate him a *prince and a great man*. When he could not call him a saint or a good man, he said nothing of that, but what was true he gave him the praise of, though he had been his enemy, that he was a *prince and a great man*. "Such a man has fallen in Israel, and fallen *this day*, just when he was doing the best deed he ever did in his life, *this day*, when he was likely to be so serviceable to the public peace and welfare and could so ill be spared." (1.) Let them all lament it. The humbling change death puts all men under is to be lamented, especially as affecting princes and great men. Alas! alas! (see Rev. xviii. 10) how mean, how little, are those made by death who made themselves the terror of the mighty in the land of the living! But we are especially obliged to lament the fall of useful men in the midst of their usefulness and when there is most need of them. A public loss must be every man's grief, for every man shares in it. Thus David took care that honour should be done to the memory of a man of merit, to animate others. (2.) Let Joab, in a particular manner, lament it, which he has less heart but more reason to do than any of them. If he could be brought to do it sincerely, it would be an expression of repentance for his sin in slaying him. If he did it in show only, as it is likely he did, yet it was a sort of penance imposed upon him, and a present commutation of the punishment. If he do not as yet expiate the murder with his blood, let him do something towards it with tears. This, perhaps, Joab submitted to with no great reluctance, now he had gained his point. Now that he is on the bier, no matter in what pomp he lies. *Sit divus, modo non sit vivus—Let him be canonized, so that he be but killed.*

4. David himself followed the corpse as chief mourner, and made a funeral oration at the grave. He attended the bier (v. 31) and wept at the grave, v. 32. Though Abner had been his enemy, and might possibly have proved no very firm friend, yet because he had been a man of bravery in the field, and might have done great service in the public counsels at this critical juncture, all former quarrels are forgotten and David is a true mourner for his fall. What he said over the grave fetched fresh floods of tears from the eyes of all that were present, when they thought they had already paid the debt in full (v. 33, 34): *Died Abner as a fool dieth?* (1.) He speaks as one vexed that Abner was fooled out of his life, that so great a man as he, so famed for conduct and courage, should be imposed upon by a colour

of friendship, slain by surprise, and so die as a fool dies. The wisest and stoutest of men have no fence against treachery. To see Abner, who thought himself the main hinge on which the great affairs of Israel turned, so considerable as himself to be able to turn the scale of a trembling government, his head full of great projects and great prospects, to see him made a fool of by a base rival, and falling on a sudden a sacrifice to his ambition and jealousy—this stains the pride of all glory, and should put one out of conceit with worldly grandeur. *Put not your trust in princes*, Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4. And let us therefore make that sure which we cannot be fooled out of. A man may have his life, and all that is dear to him, taken from him, and not be able to prevent it with all his wisdom, care, and integrity; but there is that which no thief can break through to steal. See here how much more we are beholden to God's providence than to our own prudence for the continuance of our lives and comforts. Were it not for the hold God has of the consciences of bad men, how soon would the weak and innocent become an easy prey to the strong and merciless and the wisest die as fools! Or, (2.) He speaks as one boasting that Abner did not fool himself out of his life: "*Died Abner as a fool dies?*" No, he did not, not as a criminal, a traitor or felon, that forfeits his life into the hands of public justice; his hands were not pinioned, nor his feet fettered, as those of malefactors are. Abner falls not before just men, by a judicial sentence; but as a man, an innocent man, falleth before wicked men, thieves and robbers, so feltest thou." *Died Abner as Nabal died?* so the LXX. read it. Nabal died as he lived, like himself, like a sot; but Abner's fate was such as might have been the fate of the wisest and best man in the world. Abner did not throw away his life as Asahel did, who wilfully ran upon the spear, after fair warning, but he was struck by surprise. Note, It is a sad thing to die like a fool, as those do that in any way shorten their own days, and much more those that make no provision for another world.

5. He fasted all that day, and would by no means be persuaded to eat any thing till night, v. 35. It was then the custom of great mourners to refrain for the time from bodily refreshments, as *ch. i. 12*; 1 Sam. xxxi. 13. How incongruous is it then to turn the house of mourning into a house of feasting! This respect which David paid to Abner was very pleasing to the people and satisfied them that he was not, in the least, accessory to the murder (v. 36, 37), of which he was solicitous to avoid the suspicion, lest Joab's villany should make him odious, as that of Simeon and Levi did Jacob, Gen. xxxiv. 30. On this occasion it is said, *Whatever the king did pleased all the people*. This intimates, (1.) His good affection to them. He studied to

please them in every thing and carefully avoided what might be disoblising. (2.) Their good opinion of him. They thought every thing he did well done. Such a mutual willingness to please, and easiness to be pleased, will make every relation comfortable.

6. He bewailed it that he could not with safety do justice on the murderers, *v.* 30. He was weak, his kingdom was newly planted, and a little shake would overthrow it. Joab's family had a great interest, were bold and daring, and to make them his enemies now might be of bad consequence. These sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him, too big for the law to take hold of; and therefore, though by man, by the magistrate, the blood of a murderer *should be shed* (Gen. ix. 6), David bears the sword in vain, and contents himself, as a private person, to leave them to the judgment of God: *The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.* Now this is a diminution, (1.) To David's greatness. He is anointed king, and yet is kept in awe by his own subjects, and some of them are too hard for him. Who would be fond of power when a man may have the name of it, and must be accountable for it, and yet be hampered in the use of it? (2.) To David's goodness. He ought to have done his duty, and trusted God with the issue. *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum—Let justice be done, though the heavens should fall asunder* If the law had had its course against Joab, perhaps the murder of Ishbosheth, Amnon, and others, would have been prevented. It was carnal policy and cruel pity that spared Joab. Righteousness supports the throne and will never shake it. Yet it was only a reprieve that David gave to Joab; on his death-bed he left it to Solomon (who could the better wield the sword of justice because he had no occasion to draw the sword of war) to avenge the blood of Abner. Evil pursues sinners, and will overtake them at last. David preferred Abner's son Jaasiel, 1 Chron. xxvii. 21.

#### CHAP. IV.

When Abner was slain David was at a loss for a friend to perfect the reduction of those tribes that were yet in Ish-bosheth's interest. Which way to adopt for the accomplishment of it he could not tell; but here Providence brings it about by the removal of Ish-bosheth. I. Two of his own servants slew him, and brought his head to David, *ver.* 1-8. II. David, instead of rewarding them, put them to death for what they had done, *ver.* 9-12.

**A**ND when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled. 2 And Saul's son had two men *that were* captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin: (for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin: 3 And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and were sojourners there until this day.) 4 And Jona-

than, Saul's son, had a son *that was* lame of *his* feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name *was* Mephibosheth. 5 And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, who lay on a bed at noon. 6 And they came thither into the midst of the house, as *though* they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth *rib*: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. 7 For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. 8 And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the LORD hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed.

Here is, I. The weakness of Saul's house. Still it grew weaker and weaker. 1. As for Ish-bosheth, who was in possession of the throne, his hands were feeble, *v.* 1. All the strength they ever had was from Abner's support, and now that he was dead he had no spirit left in him. Though Abner had, in a passion, deserted his interest, yet he hoped, by his means, to make good terms with David; but now even this hope fails him, and he sees himself forsaken by his friends and at the mercy of his enemies. All the Israelites that adhered to him were troubled and at a loss what to do, whether to proceed in their treaty with David or no. 2. As for Mephibosheth, who in the right of his father Jonathan had a prior title, his feet were lame, and he was unfit for any service, *v.* 4. He was but five years old when his father and grandfather were killed. His nurse, hearing of the Philistines' victory, was apprehensive that, in pursuit of it they would immediately send a party to Saul's house, to cut off all that pertained to it, and would especially aim at her young master, who was now next heir to the crown. Under the apprehension of this, she fled with the child in her arms, to secure it either in some secret place where it could not be found, or in some strong

place where he could not be got at; and, making more haste than good speed, she fell with the child, and by the fall some bone was broken or put out, and not well set, so that he was lame of it as long as he lived, and unfit either for court or camp. See what sad accidents children are liable to in their infancy, the effect of which may be felt by them, to their great uneasiness, all their days. Even the children of princes and great men, the children of good men, for such a one Jonathan was, children that are well tended, and have nurses of their own to take care of them, yet are not always safe. What reason have we to be thankful to God for the preservation of our limbs and senses to us, through the many perils of the weak and helpless state of infancy, and to own his goodness in giving his angels a charge concerning us, to bear us up in their arms, out of which there is no danger of falling, Ps. xci. 12.

II. The murder of Saul's son. We are here told,

1. Who were the murderers: *Baanah and Rechab*, v. 2, 3. They were own brothers, as Simeon and Levi, and partners in iniquity. They were or had been Ish-bosheth's own servants, employed under him, so much the more base and treacherous was it in them to do him a mischief. They were Benjamites, of his own tribe. They were of the city of Beeroth; for some reason which we cannot now account for care is here taken to let us know (in a parenthesis) that that city belonged to the lot of Benjamin, so we find (Josh. xviii. 25), but that the inhabitants, upon some occasion or other, perhaps upon the death of Saul, retired to Gittaim, another city which lay not far off in the same tribe, and was better fortified by nature, being situate (if we may depend upon Mr. Fuller's map) between the two rocks Bozez and Senah. There the Beerothites were when this was written, and probably took root there, and never returned to Beeroth again, which made Beeroth, that had been one of the cities of the Gibeonites (Josh. ix. 17), to be forgotten, and Gittaim to be famous long after, as we find, Neh. xi. 33.

2. How the murder was committed, v. 5—7. See here, (1.) The slothfulness of Ish-bosheth. He lay upon his bed at noon. It does not appear that the country was at any time of the year so hot as to oblige the inhabitants to retire at noon, as we are told they do in Spain in the heat of summer; but Ish-bosheth was a sluggish man, loved his ease and hated business: and when he should have been, at this critical juncture, at the head of his forces in the field, or at the head of his counsels in a treaty with David, he was lying upon his bed and sleeping, for his hands were feeble (v. 1), and so were his head and heart. When those difficulties dispirit us which should rather invigorate us and sharpen our endeavours we betray both our crowns and lives. *Love not sleep,*

*lest thou come to poverty and ruin.* The idle soul is an easy prey to the destroyer. (2.) The treachery of Baanah and Rechab. They came into the house, under pretence of fetching wheat for the victualling of their regiments; and such was the plainness of those times that the king's corn-chamber and his bed-chamber lay near together, which gave them an opportunity, when they were fetching wheat, to murder him as he lay on the bed. We know not when and where death will meet us. When we lie down to sleep we are not sure but that we may sleep the sleep of death before we awake; nor do we know from what unsuspected hand a fatal stroke may come. Ish-bosheth's own men, who should have protected his life, took it away.

3. The murderers triumphed in what they had done. As if they had performed some very glorious action, and the doing of it for David's advantage was enough not only to justify it, but to sanctify it, they made a present of Ish-bosheth's head to David (v. 8): *Behold the head of thy enemy*, than which they thought nothing could be more acceptable to him; yea, and they made themselves instruments of God's justice, ministers to bear his sword, though they had no commission: *The Lord hath avenged thee this day of Saul and of his seed.* Not that they had any regard either to God or to David's honour; they aimed at nothing but to make their own fortunes (as we say) and to get preferment in David's court; but, to ingratiate themselves with him, they pretended a concern for his life, a conviction of his title, and a zealous desire to see him in full possession of the throne. Jehu pretended *zeal for the Lord of hosts* when an ambition to set up himself and his own family was the spring of his actions.

9 And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, *As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity,* 10 When one told me, saying, *Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings:* 11 How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? 12 And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged *them* up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the

head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.

We have here justice done upon the murderers of Ish-bosheth.

I. Sentence passed upon them. There needed no evidence, their own tongues witnessed against them; they were so far from denying the fact that they gloried in it. David therefore shows them the heinousness of the crime, and that blood called for blood from his hand, who was now the chief magistrate, and was by office the avenger of blood. And, perhaps, he was the more vigorous in the prosecution because for reasons of state he had spared Joab: "*Shall I not require the blood of the slain at the hand of the slayers, and, since they cannot make restitution, take theirs instead of it?*" Observe, 1. How he aggravates the crime, v. 11. Ish-bosheth was a righteous person, he had done them no wrong, nor designed them any. As to himself, David was satisfied that what opposition he gave him was not from malice, but mistake, from an idea he had of his own title to the crown, and the influence of others upon him, who urged him to put in for it. Note, Charity teaches us to make the best, not only of our friends, but of our enemies, and to think those may be righteous persons who yet, in some instances, do us wrong. I must not presently judge a man a bad man because I think him so to me. David owns Ish-bosheth an honest man, though he had created him a great deal of trouble unjustly. The manner of it much aggravated the crime. To slay him in his own house, which should have been his castle, and upon his bed, when he was in no capacity of making any opposition, this is treacherous and barbarous, and all that is base, and that which the heart of every man who is not perfectly lost to all honour and humanity will rise with indignation at the thought of. Assassinating is confessedly the most odious and villanous way of murdering. *Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly.* 2. He quotes a precedent (v. 10): he had put him to death who had brought him the tidings of the death of Saul, because he thought it would be good tidings to David. Nothing is here said of that Amalekite's helping Saul to kill himself, only of his bringing the tidings of his death, by which it should seem that the story he told was upon enquiry found to be false, and that he lied against his own head. "Now" says David "did I treat him as a criminal, and not a favourite" (as he expected), "who brought me Saul's crown, and shall those be held guiltless that bring me Ish-bosheth's head?" 3. He ratifies the sentence with an oath (v. 9): *As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity.* He expresses himself thus resolutely, to prevent the making of any intercession for the criminals by those about him, and thus piously to intimate that his dependence was upon

God for the putting of him in possession of the promised throne, and that he would not be beholden to any man to help him to it by any indirect or unlawful practices. God had redeemed him from all adversity hitherto helped him over many a difficulty and through many a danger, and therefore he would depend upon him to crown and complete his own work. He speaks of his redemption from all adversity as a thing done, though he had many a storm yet before him, because he knew that he who had delivered would deliver. 4. Hereupon he signs a warrant for the execution of these men, v. 12. This may seem severe, when they intended him a kindness in what they did; but, (1.) He would thus show his detestation of the villany. When he heard that *the Lord smote Nabal, he gave thanks* (1 Sam. xxv. 38, 39), *for he is the God to whom vengeance belongeth*; but, if wicked men smite Ish-bosheth, they deserve to die for taking God's work out of his hand. (2.) He would thus show his resentment of the great affront they put upon him in expecting that he should patronize and reward it; they could scarcely have done him a greater injury than thus to think him altogether such a one as themselves, one that cared not what blood he waded through to the crown.

II. Execution done. The murderers were put to death according to law, and their hands and feet were hung up; not their whole bodies, the law forbade that; but only their hands and feet, *in terrorem—to frighten others*, to be monuments of David's justice, and to make that to be taken notice of which would recommend him to the esteem of the people, as a man fit to rule, and that aimed not at his own preferment, nor had any enmity to the house of Saul, but only and sincerely designed the public welfare. But what a confusion was this to the two murderers! What a horrid disappointment! And such those will meet with who think to serve the interests of the Son of David by any immoral practices, by war and persecution, fraud and rapine, who, under colour of religion, murder princes, break solemn contracts, lay countries waste, *hate their brethren, and cast them out, and say, Let the Lord be glorified, kill them, and think they do God good service.* However men may canonize such methods of serving the church and the catholic cause, Christ will let them know, another day, that Christianity was not intended to destroy humanity; and those who thus think to merit heaven shall not escape the damnation of hell.

#### CHAP. V.

How far Abner's deserting the house of Saul, his murder, and the murder of Ish-bosheth, might contribute to the perfecting of the revolution, and the establishing of David as king over all Israel does not appear; but, it should seem, that happy change followed presently thereupon, which in this chapter we have an account of. Here is, I. David anointed king by all the tribes, ver. 1-5. II. Making himself master of the strong-hold of Zion, ver. 6-10. III. Building himself a house and strengthening himself in his kingdom, ver. 11, 12. IV. His children that

were born after this, ver. 13—16. V. His victories over the Philistines, ver. 17—25.

**WHEN** came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. 2 Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

Here is, I. The humble address of all the tribes to David, beseeching him to take upon him the government (for they were now as sheep having no shepherd), and owning him for their king. Though David might by no means approve the murder of Ish-bosheth, yet he might improve the advantages he gained thereby, and accept the applications made to him thereupon. Judah had submitted to David as their king above seven years ago, and their ease and happiness, under his administration, encouraged the rest of the tribes to make their court to him. What numbers came from each tribe, with what zeal and sincerity they came, and how they were entertained for three days at Hebron, when they were all of one heart to make David king, we have a full account, 1 Chron. xii. 23—40. Here we have only the heads of their address, containing the grounds they went upon in making David king. 1. Their relation to him was some inducement: "*We are thy bone and thy flesh* (v. 1), not only thou art our bone and our flesh, not a stranger, unqualified by the law to be king (Deut. xvii. 15), but we are thine," that is, "we know that thou considerest us as thy bone and thy flesh, and hast as tender a concern for us as a man has for his own body, which Saul and his house had not. *We are thy bone and thy flesh*, and therefore thou wilt be as glad as we shall be to put an end to this long civil war; and thou wilt take pity on us, protect us, and do thy utmost for our welfare." Those who take Christ for their king may thus plead with him: "*We are thy bone and thy flesh*, thou hast made thyself in all things like unto thy brethren (Heb. ii. 17); therefore be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand," Isa. in. 6. 2. His former good services to the public were a further induce-

ment (v. 2): "*When Saul was king he was but the cypher, thou wast the figure, thou wast he that leddest out Israel to battle, and broughtest them in in triumph; and therefore who so fit now to fill the vacant throne?*" He that is faithful in a little deserves to be entrusted with more. Former good offices done for us should be gratefully remembered by us when there is occasion. 3. The divine appointment was the greatest inducement of all: *The Lord said, Thou shalt feed my people Israel*, that is, thou shalt rule them; for princes are to feed their people as shepherds, in every thing consulting the subjects' benefit, feeding them and not fleecing them. "And thou shalt be not only a king to govern in peace, but a captain to preside in war, and be exposed to all the toils and perils of the camp." Since God has said so, now at length, when need drives them to it, they are persuaded to say so too.

II. The public and solemn inauguration of David, v. 3. A convention of the states was called; all the elders of Israel came to him; the contract was settled, the *pacta conventa*—covenants, sworn to, and subscribed on both sides. He obliged himself to protect them as their judge in peace and captain in war; and they obliged themselves to obey him. He made a league with them to which God was a witness: it was before the Lord. Hereupon he was, for the third time, anointed king. His advances were gradual, that his faith might be tried and that he might gain experience. And thus his kingdom typified that of the Messiah, which was to come to its height by degrees; for we see not yet all things put under him (Heb. ii. 8), but we shall see it, 1 Cor. xv. 25.

III. A general account of his reign and age. He was thirty years old when he began to reign, upon the death of Saul, v. 4. At that age the Levites were at first appointed to begin their administration, Num. iv. 3. About that age the Son of David entered upon his public ministry, Luke iii. 23. Then men come to their full maturity of strength and judgment. He reigned, in all, forty years and six months, of which seven years and a half in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem, v. 5. Hebron had been famous, Josh. xiv. 15. It was a priest's city. But Jerusalem was to be more so, and to be the holy city. Great kings affected to raise cities of their own, Gen. x 11, 36, 32—35. David did so, and Jerusalem was the city of David. It is a name famous to the end of the Bible (Rev. xxi.), where we read of a new Jerusalem.

6 And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking,

David cannot come in hither. 7 Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. 8 And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, *that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain.* Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. 9 So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward. 10 And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts *was* with him.

If Salem, the place of which Melchizedec was king, was Jerusalem (as seems probable from Ps. lxxvi. 2), it was famous in Abraham's time. Joshua, in his time, found it the chief city of the south part of Canaan, Josh. x. 1—3. It fell to Benjamin's lot (Josh. xviii. 28), but joined close to Judah's, Josh. xv. 8. The children of Judah had taken it (Judg. i. 8), but the children of Benjamin suffered the Jebusites to dwell among them (Judg. i. 21), and they grew so upon them that it became a *city of Jebusites*, Judg. xix. 11. Now the very first exploit David did, after he was anointed king over all Israel, was to gain Jerusalem out of the hand of the Jebusites, which, because it belonged to Benjamin, he could not well attempt till that tribe, which long adhered to Saul's house (1 Chron. xii. 29), submitted to him. Here we have,

I. The Jebusites' defiance of David and his forces. They said, *Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither, v. 6.* They sent David this provoking message, because, as it is said afterwards, on another occasion, they could not believe that *ever an enemy would enter into the gates of Jerusalem*, Lam. iv. 12. They confided either, 1. In the protection of their gods, which David, in contempt, had called *the blind and the lame, for they have eyes and see not, feet and walk not.* "But," say they, "these are the guardians of our city, and except thou take these away (which thou canst never do) thou canst not come in hither." Some think they were constellated images of brass set up in the recess of the fort, and entrusted with the custody of the place. They called their idols their *Mauz-zim*, or *strong-holds* (Dan. xi. 38) and as such relied on them. *The name of the Lord is our strong tower*, and his arm is strong, his eyes are piercing. Or, 2. In the strength of their fortifications, which they thought were made so impregnable by nature or art, or both, that the blind and the lame were sufficient to defend them against the most powerful assailant. The strong-hold of Zion they

especially depended on, as that which could not be forced. Probably they set blind and lame people, invalids or maimed soldiers, to make their appearance upon the walls, in scorn of David and his men, judging them an equal match for him. Though there remain but wounded men among them, yet they should serve to beat back the besiegers. Compare Jer. xxxvii. 10. Note, The enemies of God's people are often very confident of their own strength and most secure when their day to fall draws nigh.

II. David's success against the Jebusites. Their pride and insolence, instead of daunting him, animated him, and when he made a general assault he gave this order to his men: "*He that smiteth the Jebusites, let him also throw down into the ditch, or gutter, the lame and the blind, which are set upon the wall to affront us and our God.*" It is probable they had themselves spoken blasphemous things, and were therefore hated of David's soul. Thus v. 8 may be read; we fetch our reading of it from 1 Chron. xi. 6, which speaks only of smiting the Jebusites, but nothing of the blind and the lame. The Jebusites had said that if these images of theirs did not protect them *the blind and the lame should not come into the house*, that is, they would never again trust their palladium (so Mr. Gregory understands it) nor pay the respect they had paid to their images; and David, having gained the fort, said so too, that these images, which could not protect their worshippers, should never have any place there more.

III. His fixing his royal seat in Sion. He himself dwelt in the fort (the strength whereof, which had given him opposition, and was a terror to him, now contributed to his safety), and he built houses round about for his attendants and guards (v. 9) from Millo (the town-hall, or state-house) and inward. He proceeded and prospered in all he set his hand to, grew great in honour, strength, and wealth, more and more honourable in the eyes of his subjects and formidable in the eyes of his enemies; for *the Lord God of hosts was with him*. God has all creatures at his command, makes what use he pleases of them, and serves his own purposes by them; and he was with him, to direct, preserve, and prosper him. Those that have the Lord of hosts for their need not fear what hosts of men or devils can do against them. Those who grow great must ascribe their advancement to the presence of God with them, and give him the glory of it. The church is called *Sion*, and the *city of the living God*. The Jebusites, Christ's enemies, must first be conquered and possessed, the blind and the lame taken away, and then Christ divides the spoil, sets up his throne there, and makes it his residence by the Spirit.

11 And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees

and carpenters, and masons: and they built David a house. 12 And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake. 13 And David took *him* more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David. 14 And these *be* the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammuah, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, 15 Ibhar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia, 16 And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet.

Here is, I. David's house built, a royal palace, fit for the reception of the court he kept and the homage that was paid to him, v. 11. The Jews were husbandmen and shepherds, and did not much addict themselves either to merchandise or manufactures; and therefore Hiram, king of Tyre, a wealthy prince, when he sent to congratulate David on his accession to the throne, offered him workmen to build him a house. David thankfully accepted the offer, and Hiram's workmen built David a house to his mind. Many have excelled in arts and sciences who were strangers to the covenants of promise. Yet David's house was never the worse, nor the less fit to be dedicated to God, for being built by the sons of the stranger. It is prophesied of the gospel church, *The sons of the strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee*, Isa. lx. 10.

II. David's government settled and built up, v. 12. 1. His kingdom was established, there was nothing to shake it, none to disturb his possession or question his title. He that made him king established him, because he was to be a type of Christ, with whom God's hand should be established, and his *covenant stand fast*, Ps. lxxxix. 21—28. Saul was made king, but not established; so Adam in innocency. David was established king, so is the Son of David, with all who through him are made to our God *kings and priests*. 2. It was exalted in the eyes both of its friends and enemies. Never had the nation of Israel looked so great or made such a figure as it began now to do. Thus it is promised of Christ that he shall be *higher than the kings of the earth*, Ps. lxxxix. 27. God has *highly exalted him*, Phil. ii. 9. 3. David perceived, by the wonderful concurrence of providences to his establishment and advancement, that God was with him. *By this I know that thou favourest me*, Ps. xli. 11. Many have the favour of God and do not perceive it, and so want the comfort of it: but to be exalted to that and established in

it, and to perceive it, is happiness enough 4. He owned that it was for his people Israel's sake that God had done great thing for him, that he might be a blessing to them and they might be happy under his administration. God did not make Israel his subjects for his sake, that he might be great, and rich, and absolute: but he made him their king for their sake, that he might lead, and guide, and protect them. Kings are *ministers of God to their people for good*, Rom. xiii. 4.

III. David's family multiplied and increased. All the sons that were born to him after he came to Jerusalem are here mentioned together, eleven in all, besides the six that were born to him before in Hebron, *ch. iii. 2, 5*. There the mothers are mentioned, not *here*; only, in general, it is said that he *took more concubines and wives*, v. 13. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not; we justify him not; nor can we scarcely excuse him. The bad example of the patriarchs might make him think there was no harm in it, and he might hope it would strengthen his interest, by multiplying his alliances, and increasing the royal family. *Happy is the man that has his quiver full of these arrows*. But one vine by the side of the house, with the blessing of God, may send boughs to the sea and branches to the rivers. Adam, by one wife, peopled the world, and Noah re-peopled it. David had many wives, and yet that did not keep him from coveting his neighbour's wife and defiling her; for men that have once broken the fence will wander endlessly. Of David's concubines, see 2 Sam. xv. 16; xvi. 22; xix. 5. Of his sons, see 1 Chron. iii. 1—9.

17 But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard *of it*, and went down to the hold. 18 The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. 19 And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand. 20 And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim. 21 And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them. 22 And the

Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. 24 And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. 25 And David did so, as the LORD had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.

The particular service for which David was raised up was to *save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*, ch. iii. 18. This therefore divine Providence, in the first place, gives him an opportunity of accomplishing. Two great victories obtained over the Philistines we have here an account of, by which David not only balanced the disgrace and retrieved the loss Israel had sustained in the battle wherein Saul was slain, but went far towards the total subduing of those vexatious neighbours, the last remains of the devoted nations.

I. In both these actions the Philistines were the aggressors, stirred first towards their own destruction, and pulled it on their own heads. 1. In the former they came up to seek David (v. 17), because they heard that he was *anointed king over Israel*. He that under Saul had slain his ten thousands, what would he do when he himself came to be king! They therefore thought it was time to look about them, and try to crush his government in its infancy, before it was well settled. Their success against Saul, some years ago, perhaps encouraged them to make this attack upon David; but they considered not that David had that presence of God with him which Saul had forfeited and lost. The kingdom of the Messiah, as soon as ever it was set up in the world, was thus vigorously attacked by the powers of darkness, who, with the combined force both of Jews and Gentiles, made head against it. The heathen raged, and the kings of the earth set themselves to oppose it; but all in vain, Ps. ii. 1, &c. The destruction will turn, as this did, upon Satan's own kingdom. They took counsel together, but were *broken in pieces*, Isa. viii. 9, 10. 2. In the latter they came up yet again, hoping to recover what they had lost in the former engagement, and their hearts being hardened to their destruction, v. 22. 3. In both they spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim, which lay very near Jerusalem. That city they hoped to make themselves masters of before David had completed

the fortifications of it. Jerusalem, from its infancy, has been aimed at, and struck at, with a particular enmity. Their spreading themselves intimates that they were very numerous and that they made a very formidable appearance. We read of the church's enemies going up on the breadth of the earth (Rev. xx. 9), but the further they spread themselves the fairer mark they are to God's arrows.

II. In both, David, though forward enough to go forth against them (for as soon as he heard it he went down to the hold, to secure some important and advantageous post, r. 17), yet entered not upon action till he had enquired of the Lord by the breast-plate of judgment, v. 19, and again, v. 23. His enquiry was twofold:—1. Concerning his duty: "Shall I go up? Shall I have a commission from heaven to engage them?" One would think he needed not doubt this; what was he made king for, but to fight the battles of the Lord and Israel? But a good man loves to see God going before him in every step he takes. "Shall I go up now?" It is to be done, but is it to be done at this time? *In all thy ways acknowledge him*. And besides, though the Philistines were public enemies, yet some of them had been his particular friends. Achish had been kind to him in his distress, and had protected him. "Now," says David, "ought not I, in remembrance of that, rather to make peace with them than to make war with them?" "No," says God, "they are Israel's enemies, and are doomed to destruction, and therefore scruple not, but go up." 2. Concerning his success. His conscience asked the former question, *Shall I go up?* His prudence asked this, *Wilt thou deliver them into my hand?* Hereby he owns his dependence on God for victory, that he could not conquer them unless God delivered them into his hand, and refers his cause to the good pleasure of God: *Wilt thou do it?* Yea, says God, *I will doubtless do it*. If God send us, he will bear us out and stand by us. The assurance God has given us of victory over our spiritual enemies, that he will tread Satan under our feet shortly, should animate us in our spiritual conflicts. We do not fight at uncertainty. David had now a great army at command and in good heart, yet he relied more on God's promise than his own force.

II. In the former of these engagements David routed the army of the Philistines by dint of sword (r. 20): He smote them; and when he had done, 1. He gave his God the glory; he said, "The Lord has broken forth upon my enemies before me. I could not have done it if he had not done it before me; he opened the breach like the breach of waters in a dam, which when once opened grows wider and wider." The principal part of the work was God's doing; nay, he did all; what David did was not worth speaking of; and therefore, *Not unto us, but unto the Lord, give glory*. He hoped likewise that this breach, like that of



waters, was as the opening of the sluice, to let in a final desolation upon them; and, to perpetuate the remembrance of it, he called the place *Baal-perazim*, the master of the breaches, because, God having broken in upon their forces, he soon had the mastery of them. Let posterity take notice of it to God's honour. 2. He put their gods to shame. They brought the images of their gods into the field as their protectors, in imitation of the Israelites bringing the ark into their camp; but, being put to flight, they could not stay to carry off their images, for they were a burden to the weary beasts (Isa. xlv. 1), and therefore they left them to fall with the rest of their baggage into the hands of the conqueror. Their images failed them, and gave them no assistance, and therefore they left their images to shift for themselves. God can make men weary of those things that they have been most fond of, and compel them to desert what they dote upon, and cast even the idols of silver and gold to the moles and the bats, Isa. ii. 20, 21. David and his men converted to their own use the rest of the plunder, but the images they burnt, as God had appointed (Deut. vii. 5): "You shall burn their graven images with fire, in token of your detestation of idolatry, and lest they should be a snare." Bishop Patrick well observes here that when the ark fell into the Philistines' hands it consumed them, but, when these images fell into the hands of Israel, they could not save themselves from being consumed.

IV. In the latter of these engagements God gave David some sensible tokens of his presence with him, bade him not fall upon them directly, as he had done before, but *fetch a compass behind them*, v. 23. 1. God appoints him to draw back, as *Israel stood still to see the salvation of the Lord*. 2. He promised him to charge the enemy himself, by an invisible host of angels, v. 24. "Thou shalt hear the sound of a going, like the march of an army in the air, upon the tops of the mulberry trees." Angels tread light, and he that can walk upon the clouds can, when he pleases, walk on the tops of trees, or (as bishop Patrick understands it) at the head of the mulberry-trees, that is, of the wood, or hedge-row of those trees. "And, by that sign, thou shalt know that the Lord goes out before thee; though thou see him not, yet thou shalt hear him, and faith shall come and be confirmed by hearing. He goes forth to smite the host of the Philistines." When David had himself smitten them (v. 20), he ascribed it to God: *The Lord has broken forth upon my enemies*, to reward him for which thankful acknowledgment the next time God did it himself alone, without putting him to any toil or peril. Those that own God in what he has done for them will find him doing more. But observe, Though God promised to go before him and smite the Philistines, yet David, when he heard the

sound of the going must bestir himself and be ready to pursue the victory. Nete, God's grace must quicken our endeavours. If God work in us both to will and to do, it does not follow that we must sit still, as those that have nothing to do, but we must therefore *work out our own salvation* with all possible care and diligence, Phil. ii. 12, 13. The sound of the going was, (1.) A signal to David when to move; it is comfortable going out when God goes before us. And, (2.) Perhaps it was an alarm to the enemy, and put them into confusion. Hearing the march of an army against their front, they retreated with precipitation, and fell into David's army which lay behind them in their rear. Of those whom God fights against it is said (Lev. xxvi. 36), *The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them*. (3.) The success of this is briefly set down, v. 25. David observed his orders, waited till God moved, and stirred then, but not till then. Thus he was trained up in a dependence on God and his providence. God performed his promise, went before him, and routed all the enemies' force, and David failed not to improve his advantages; he smote the Philistines, even to the borders of their own country. When the kingdom of the Messiah was to be set up, the apostles that were to beat down the devil's kingdom must not attempt any thing till they received the promise of the Spirit, who came with a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind (Acts ii. 2), which was typified by this sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry trees; and, when they heard that, they must bestir themselves, and did so; they went forth conquering and to conquer.

## CHAP. VI.

The obscurity of the ark, during the reign of Saul, had been a great grievance to Israel as the insults of the Philistines. David, having humbled the Philistines and mortified them, in gratitude for that favour, and in pursuance of his designs for the public welfare, is here bringing up the ark to his own city, that it might be near him, and be an ornament and strength to his new foundation. Here 15, 1. An attempt to do it, which failed and miscarried. The design was well laid, ver. 1, 2. But, 1. They were guilty of an error in carrying it in a cart, ver. 3-5. 2. They were punished for that error by the sudden death of Uzzah (ver. 6, 7), which was a great terror to David (ver. 8, 9) and put a stop to his proceedings, ver. 10, 11. 11. The great joy and satisfaction with which it was at last done, ver. 12-15. And, 1. The good understanding between David and his people, ver. 17-19. 2. The uneasiness between David and his wife upon that occasion, ver. 16, 20-23. And, when we consider that the ark was both the token of God's presence and a type of Christ, we shall see that this story is very instructive.

**A** GAIN, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubims. 3 And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah, and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab,

drave the new cart. 4 And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5 And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

We have not heard a word of the ark since it was lodged in Kirjath-jearim, immediately after its return out of its captivity among the Philistines (1 Sam. vii. 1, 2), except that, once, Saul called for it, 1 Sam. xiv. 18. That which in former days had made so great a figure is now thrown aside, as a neglected thing, for many years. And, if now the ark was for so many years in a house, let it not seem strange that we find the church so long in the wilderness, Rev. xii. 14. Perpetual visibility is no mark of the true church. God is graciously present with the souls of his people even when they want the external tokens of his presence. But now that David is settled in the throne the honour of the ark begins to revive, and *Israel's care of it to flourish again, wherein also, no doubt, the good people among them had been careful, but they lacked opportunity.* See Phil. iv. 10.

I. Here is honourable mention made of the ark. Because it had not been spoken of a great while, now that it is spoken of observe how it is described (v. 2): it is *the ark of God whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim, or at which the name, even the name of the Lord of hosts, was called upon, or upon which the name of the Lord of hosts was called, or because of which the name is proclaimed, the name of the Lord of hosts* (that is, God was greatly magnified in the miracles done before the ark), or *the ark of God, who is called the name* (Lev. xxiv. 11, 16), *the name of the Lord of hosts, sitting on the cherubim upon it.* Let us learn hence, 1. To think and speak highly of God. He is the name above every name, *the Lord of hosts*, that has all the creatures in heaven and earth at his command, and receives homage from them all, and yet is pleased to dwell between the cherubim, over the propitiatory or mercy-seat, graciously manifesting himself to his people, reconciled in a Mediator, and ready to do them good. 2. To think and speak honourably of holy ordinances, which are to us, as the ark was to Israel, the tokens of God's presence (Matt. xxviii. 20), and the means of our communion with him, Ps. xxvii. 4. It is the honour of the ark that it is the ark of God; he is jealous for it, is magnified in it, his name is called upon it. The divine institution puts a beauty and grandeur upon holy ordinances,

which otherwise have no form nor comeliness. Christ is our ark. In and by him God manifests his favour and communicates his grace to us, and accepts our adoration and addresses.

II. Here is an honourable attendance given to the ark upon the removal of it. Now, at length, it is enquired after, David made the motion (1 Chron. xiii. 1—3), and the heads of the congregation agreed to it, v. 4. All the chosen men of Israel are called together to grace the solemnity, to pay their respect to the ark, and to testify their joy in its restoration. The nobility and gentry, elders and officers, came to the number of 30,000 (c. 1), and the generality of the common people besides (1 Chron. xiii. 5); for, some think, it was done at one of the three great festivals. This would make a noble cavalcade, and would help to inspire the young people of the nation, who perhaps had scarcely heard of the ark, with a great veneration for it, for this was certainly a treasure of inestimable value which the king himself and all the great men waited upon, and were a guard to

III. Here are great expressions of joy upon the removal of the ark, v. 5. David himself, and all that were with him that were musically inclined, made use of such instruments as they had to excite and express their rejoicing upon this occasion. It might well put them into a transport of joy to see the ark rise out of obscurity and move towards a public station. It is better to have the ark in a house than not at all, better in a house than a captive in Dagon's temple; but it is very desirable to have it in a tent pitched on purpose for it, where the resort to it may be more free and open. As secret worship is better the more secret it is, so public worship is better the more public it is; and we have reason to rejoice when restraints are taken off, and the ark of God finds welcome in the city of David, and has not only the protection and support, but the countenance and encouragement, of the civil powers; for joy of this they played before the Lord. Note, Public joy must always be as before the Lord, with an eye to him and terminating in him, and must not degenerate into that which is carnal and sensual. Dr. Lightfoot apposes that, upon this occasion, David penned the 68th Psalm, because it begins with that ancient prayer of Moses at the removing of the ark, *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered*; and notice is taken there (v. 25) of the *singers and players on instruments* that attended, and (v. 27) of the princes of several of the tribes; and perhaps those words in the last verse, *O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places*, were added upon occasion of the death of Uzzah.

IV. Here is an error that they were guilty of in this matter, that they carried the ark in a cart or carriage, whereas the priests should have carried it upon their shoulders, v. 3.

The Kohathites that had the charge of the ark had no waggons assigned them, because *their service was to bear it upon their shoulders*, Num. vii. 9. The ark was no such heavy burden but that they might, among them, have carried it as far as Mount Zion upon their shoulders, they needed not to put it in a cart like a common thing. It was no excuse for them that the Philistines had done so and were not punished for it; they knew no better, nor had they any priests or Levites with them to undertake the carrying of it; better carry it in a cart than that any of Dagon's priests should carry it. Philistines may cart the ark with impunity; but, if Israelites do so, they do it at their peril. And it mended the matter very little that it was a new cart; old or new, it was not what God had appointed. I wonder how so wise and good a man as David was, that conversed so much with the law of God, came to be guilty of such an oversight. We will charitably hope that it was because he was so extremely intent upon the substance of the service that he forgot to take care of this circumstance.

6 And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth *his hand* to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for *his error*; and there he died by the ark of God. 8 And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. 9 And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me? 10 So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11 And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the LORD blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.

We have here Uzzah struck dead for touching the ark, when it was upon its journey towards the city of David, a sad providence, which damped their mirth, stopped the progress of the ark, and, for the present, dispersed this great assembly, which had come together to attend it, and sent them home in a fright.

I. Uzzah's offence seems very small. He and his brother Ahio, the sons of Ahinadab, in whose house the ark had long been lodged, having been used to attend it, to show their

willingness to prefer the public benefit to their own private honour and advantage, undertook to drive the cart in which the ark was carried, this being perhaps the last service they were likely to do it; for others would be employed about it when it came to the city of David. Ahio went before, to clear the way, and, if need were, to lead the oxen. Uzzah followed close to the side of the cart. It happened that the oxen shook it, v. 6. The critics are not agreed about the signification of the original word: *They stumbled* (so our margin); *they kicked* (so some), perhaps against the goad with which Uzzah drove them; *they stuck in the mire*, so some. By some accident or other the ark was in danger of being overthrown. Uzzah thereupon laid hold of it, to save it from falling, we have reason to think with a very good intention, to preserve the reputation of the ark and to prevent a bad omen. Yet this was his crime. Uzzah was a Levite, but priests only might touch the ark. The law was express concerning the Kohathites, that, though they were to carry the ark by the staves, yet *they must not touch any holy thing, lest they die*, Num. iv. 15. Uzzah's long familiarity with the ark, and the constant attendance he had given to it, might occasion his presumption, but would not excuse it.

II. His punishment for this offence seems very great (v. 7): *The anger of the Lord was kindled against him* (for in sacred things he is a jealous God) and he smote him there for *his rashness*, as the word is, and struck him dead upon the spot. There he sinned, and there he died, *by the ark of God*; even the mercy-seat would not save him. Why was God thus severe with him? 1. The touching of the ark was forbidden to the Levites expressly under pain of death—*lest they die*; and God, by this instance of severity, would show how he might justly have dealt with our first parents, when they had eaten that which was forbidden under the same penalty—*lest you die*. 2. God saw the presumption and irreverence of Uzzah's heart. Perhaps he affected to show, before this great assembly, how bold he could make with the ark, having been so long acquainted with it. Familiarity, even with that which is most awful, is apt to breed contempt. 3. David afterwards owned that Uzzah died for an error they were all guilty of, which was carrying the ark in a cart. Because it was not carried on the Levites' shoulders, *the Lord made that breach upon us*, 1 Chron. xv. 13. But Uzzah was singled out to be made an example, perhaps because he had been most forward in advising that way of conveyance; however he had fallen into another error, which was occasioned by that. Perhaps the ark was not covered, as it should have been, with the covering of badgers' skins (Num. iv. 6), and that was a further provocation. 4. God would hereby strike

an awe upon the thousands of Israel, would convince them that the ark was never the less venerable for its having been so long in mean circumstances, and thus he would teach them to rejoice with trembling, and always to treat holy things with reverence and holy fear. 5. God would hereby teach us that a good intention will not justify a bad action; it will not suffice to say of that which is ill done that it was well meant. He will let us know that he can and will secure his ark, and needs not any man's sin to help him to do it. 6. If it was so great a crime for one to lay hold on the ark of the covenant that had no right to do so, what is it for those to lay claim to the privileges of the covenant that come not up to the terms of it? To the wicked God says, *What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth?* Ps. 1. 16. *Friend, how comest thou in hither?* If the ark was so sacred, and not to be touched irreverently, what is the *blood of the covenant?* Heb. x. 29.

III. David's feelings on the infliction of this stroke were keen, and perhaps not altogether as they should have been. He should have humbled himself under God's hand, confessed his error, acknowledged God's righteousness, and deprecated the further tokens of his displeasure, and then have gone on with the good work he had in hand. But we find, 1. He was displeased. It is not said because Uzzah had affronted God, but because God had made a breach upon Uzzah (v. 8): *David's anger was kindled.* It is the same word that is used for God's displeasure, v. 7. Because God was angry, David was angry and out of humour. As if God might not assert the honour of his ark, and frown upon one that touched it rudely, without asking David leave. Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, arraign his proceedings, or charge him with iniquity? David did not now act like himself, like a man after God's own heart. It is not for us to be displeased at any thing that God does, how displeasing soever it is to us. The death of Uzzah was indeed an eclipse to the glory of a solemnity which David valued himself upon more than any thing else, and might give birth to some speculations among those that were disaffected to him, as if God were departing from him too; but he ought nevertheless to have subscribed to the righteousness and wisdom of God in it, and not to have been displeased at it. When we lie under God's anger we must keep under our own. 2. He was afraid, v. 9. It should seem he was afraid with amazement; for he said, *How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?* As if God sought advantages against all that were about him, and was so extremely tender of his ark that there was no dealing with it; and therefore better for him to keep it at a distance. *Qui procul a Jove, procul a fulmine—To retire from Jove is to retire from the thunder-bolt.* He should

rather have said, "Let the ark come to me, and I will take warning by this to treat it with more reverence." *Provoke me not* (says God, Jer. xxv. 6) *and I will do you no hurt.* Or this may be looked upon as a good use which David made of this tremendous judgment. He did not say, "Surely Uzzah was a sinner above all men, because he suffered such things," but is concerned for himself, as one conscious, not only of his own unworthiness of God's favour, but his obnoxiousness to God's displeasure. "God might justly strike me dead as he did Uzzah. *My flesh trembles for fear of thee,*" Ps. cxix. 120. This God intends in his judgments, that others may hear and fear. David therefore will not bring the ark into his own city (v. 10) till he is better prepared for its reception. 3. He took care to perpetuate the remembrance of this stroke by a new name he gave to the place: *Perez-uzzah, the breach of Uzzah,* v. 8. He had been lately triumphing in the breach made upon his enemies, and called the place *Baal-perazim, a place of breaches.* But here is a breach upon his friends. When we see one breach, we should consider that we know not where the next will be. The memorial of this stroke would be a warning to posterity to take heed of all rashness and irreverence in dealing about holy things; for *God will be sanctified in those that come nigh unto him.* 4. He lodged the ark in a good house, the house of Obed-edom a Levite, which happened to be near the place where this disaster happened, and there, (1.) It was kindly entertained and welcomed, and continued there *three months,* v. 10, 11. Obed-edom knew what slaughter the ark had made among the Philistines that imprisoned it and the Bethshemites that looked into it. He saw Uzzah struck dead for touching it, and perceived that David himself was afraid of meddling with it; yet he cheerfully invites it to his own house, and opens his doors to it without fear, knowing it was a *savour of death unto death* only to those that treated it ill. "O the courage," says bishop Hall, "of an honest and faithful heart! nothing can make God otherwise than amiable to his own people: even his very justice is lovely." (2.) It paid well for its entertainment. *The Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.* The same hand that punished Uzzah's proud presumption rewarded Obed-edom's humble boldness, and made the ark to him a *savour of life unto life.* Let none think the worse of the gospel for the judgments inflicted on those that reject it, but set in opposition to them the blessings it brings to those that duly receive it. None ever had, nor ever shall have, reason to say that *it is in vain to serve God.* Let masters of families be encouraged to keep up religion in their families, and to serve God and the interests of his kingdom with their houses and estates, for that is the way to bring a blessing upon all

they have. The ark is a guest which none shall lose by that bid it welcome. Josephus says that, whereas before Obed-edom was poor, on a sudden, in these three months, his estate increased, to the envy of his neighbours. Piety is the best friend to prosperity. In wisdom's left hand are riches and honour. His household shared in the blessing. It is good living in a family that entertains the ark, for all about it will fare the better for it.

12 And it was told king David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that *pertaineth* unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. 13 And it was *so*, that when they that bare the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings. 14 And David danced before the LORD, with all *his* might; and David *was* girded with a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. 16 And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. 17 And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 18 And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. 19 And he dealt among all the people, *even* among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of *flesh*, and a flagon of *wine*. So all the people departed every one to his house.

We have here the second attempt to bring the ark home to the city of David; and this succeeded, though the former miscarried.

I. It should seem the blessing with which the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the ark's sake was a great inducement to David to bring it forward; for when that was told

him (v. 12) he hastened to fetch it to him. For, 1. It was an evidence that God was reconciled to *them*, and his anger was turned away. As David could read God's frowns upon them all in Uzzah's stroke, so he could read God's favour to them all in Obed-edom's prosperity; and, if God be at peace with them, they can cheerfully go on with their design. 2. It was an evidence that the ark was not such a burdensome stone as it was taken to be, but, on the contrary, happy was the man that had it near him. Christ is indeed a *stone of stumbling*, and a *rock of offence*, to those that are disobedient; but to those who believe he is a *corner-stone*, *elect*, *precious*, 1 Pet. ii. 6—8. When David heard that Obed-edom had such joy of the ark, then he would have it in his own city. Note, The experience others have had of the gains of godliness should encourage us to be religious. Is the ark a blessing to others' houses? let us bid it welcome to ours; we may have it, and the blessing of it, without fetching it from our neighbours.

II. Let us see how David managed the matter now. 1. He rectified the former error. He did not put the ark in a cart now, but ordered those whose business it was to carry it on their shoulders. This is implied here (v. 13) and expressed 1 Chron. xv. 15. Then we make a good use of the judgments of God on ourselves and others when we are awakened by them to reform and amend whatever has been amiss. 2. At their first setting out he offered sacrifices to God (v. 13) by way of atonement for their former errors and in a thankful acknowledgment of the blessings bestowed on the house of Obed-edom. Then we are likely to speed in our enterprises when we begin with God and give diligence to make our peace with him. When we attend upon God in holy ordinances our eye must be to the great sacrifice, to which we owe it that we are taken into covenant and communion with God, Ps. l. 5. 3. He himself attended the solemnity with the highest expressions of joy that could be (v. 14): *He danced before the Lord with all his might*; he leaped for joy, as one transported with the occasion, and the more because of the disappointment he met with the last time. It is a pleasure to a good man to see his errors rectified and himself in the way of his duty. His dancing, I suppose, was not artificial, by any certain rule or measure, nor do we find that any danced with him; but it was a natural expression of his great joy and exultation of mind. He did it with all his might; so we should perform all our religious services, as those that are intent upon them and desire to do them in the best manner. All our might is little enough to be employed in holy duties: the work deserves it all. On this occasion David laid aside his imperial purple, and put on a plain linen ephod, which was light and convenient for dancing, and was used in religious

exercises by those who were no priests, for Samuel wore one, 1 Sam. ii. 18. That great prince thought it no disparagement to him to appear in the habit of a minister to the ark. 4. All the people triumphed in this advancement of the ark (v. 15): *They brought it up into the royal city with shouting, and with sound of trumpet*, so expressing their own joy in loud acclamations, and giving notice to all about them to rejoice with them. The public and free administration of ordinances, not only under the protection, but under the smiles, of the civil powers, is just matter of rejoicing to any people. 5. The ark was safely brought to, and honourably deposited in, the place prepared for it, v. 17. They set it in the *midst of the tabernacle*, or tent, which David had pitched for it; not the tabernacle which Moses reared, for that was at Gibeon (2 Chron. i. 13), and, we may suppose, being made of cloth, in so many hundred years it had gone to decay and was not fit to be removed; but this was a tent set up on purpose to receive the ark. He would not bring it into a private house, no, not his own, lest it should seem to be too much engrossed, and people's resort to it, to pray before it, should be less free; yet he would not build a house for it, lest that should supersede the building of a more stately temple in due time, and therefore, for the present, he placed it within curtains, under a canopy, in imitation of Moses's tabernacle. As soon as ever it was lodged, he offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, in thankfulness to God that the business was now done without any more errors or breaches, and in supplication to God for the continuance of his favour. Note, All our joys must be sanctified both with praises and prayers; *for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. Now, it should seem, he penned the 132d Psalm. 6. The people were then dismissed with great satisfaction. He sent them away, (1.) With a gracious prayer: *He blessed them in the name of the Lord of hosts* (v. 18), having not only a particular interest in heaven as a prophet, but an authority over them as a prince; *for the less is blessed of the better*, Heb. vii. 7. He prayed to God to bless them, and particularly to reward them for the honour and respect they had now shown to his ark, assuring them they should be no losers by their journey, but the blessing of God upon their affairs at home would more than bear their charges. He testified his desire for their welfare by this prayer for them, and let them know they had a king that loved them. (2.) With a generous treat; for so it was, rather than a distribution of alms. The great men, it is probable, he entertained at his own house, but to the *multitude of Israel, men and women* (and children, says Josephus), he dealt to every one a *cake of bread* (a *spice-cake*, so some), a *good piece of flesh*—a *handsome decent piece* (so some)—*a part of the peace-offerings* (so Josephus), that they might feast

with him upon the sacrifice, and a *flagon*, or bottle, of wine, v. 19. Probably he ordered this provision to be made for them at their respective quarters, and this he did, [1.] In token of his joy and gratitude to God. When the heart is enlarged in cheerfulness the hand should be opened in liberality. The feast of Purim was observed with *sending portions one to another*, Esth. ix. 22. As those to whom God is merciful ought to show mercy in forgiving, so those to whom God is bountiful ought to exercise bounty in giving. [2.] To recommend himself to the people, and confirm his interest in them; *for every one is a friend to him that giveth gifts*. Those that cared not for his prayers would love him for his generosity; and this would encourage them to attend him another time if he saw cause to call them together.

20 Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! 21 And David said unto Michal, *It was before the LORD*, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD. 22 And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour. 23 Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

David, having dismissed the congregation with a blessing, returned to bless his household (v. 20), that is, to pray with them and for them, and to offer up his family thanksgiving for this national mercy. Ministers must not think that their public performances will excuse them from their family-worship: but when they have, with their instructions and prayers, blessed the solemn assemblies, they must return in the same manner to bless their households, for with them they are in a particular manner charged. David, though he had prophets, and priests, and Levites, about him, to be his chaplains, yet did not devolve the work upon them, but himself blessed his household. It is angels' work to worship God, and therefore surely that can be no disparagement to the greatest of men.

Never did David return to his house with so much pleasure and satisfaction as he did

now that he had got the ark into his neighbourhood; and yet even this joyful day concluded with some uneasiness, occasioned by the pride and peevishness of his wife. Even the palaces of princes are not exempt from domestic troubles. David had pleased all the multitude of Israel, but Michal was not pleased with his dancing before the ark. For this, when he was at a distance, she scorned him, and when he came home she scolded him. She was not displeased at his generosity to the people, nor did she grudge the entertainment he gave them; but she thought he degraded himself too much in dancing before the ark. It was not her covetousness, but her pride, that made her fret.

I. When she saw David in the street dancing before the Lord she *despised him in her heart*, v. 16. She thought this mighty zeal of his for the ark of God, and the transport of joy he was in upon its coming home to him, was but a foolish thing, and unbecoming so great a soldier, and statesman, and monarch, as he was. It would have been enough for him to encourage the devotion of others, but she looked upon it as a thing below him to appear so very devout himself. "What a fool" (thinks she) "does my husband make of himself now! How fond is he of this ark, that might as well have lain still where it had lain for so many years! Much devotion has almost made him mad." Note, The exercises of religion appear very mean in the eyes of those that have little or no religion themselves.

II. When he came home in the very best disposition she began to upbraid him, and was so full of disdain and indignation that she could not contain till she had him in private, but went out to meet him with her reproaches. Observe,

1. How she taunted him (v. 20): "*How glorious was the king of Israel to-day! What a figure didst thou make to-day in the midst of the mob! How unbecoming thy post and character!*" Her contempt of him and his devotion began in the heart, but out of the abundance of that the mouth spoke. That which displeased her was his affection to the ark, which she wished he had no greater kindness for than she had: but she basely represents his conduct, in dancing before the ark, as lewd and immodest; and, while really she was displeased at it as a diminution to his honour, she pretended to dislike it as a reproach to his virtue, that he *uncovered himself in the eyes of the maid-servants*, as no man would have done but *one of the vain fellows* that cared not how much he shamed himself. We have no reason to think that this was true in fact. David, no doubt, observed decorum, and governed his zeal with discretion. But it is common for those that reproach religion thus to put false colours upon it and lay it under the most odious characters. To have abused any man thus for his pious zeal would have been very

profane, but to abuse her own husband thus, whom she ought to have revered, and one whose prudence and virtue were above the reach of malice itself to disparage, one who had shown such affection for her that he would not accept a crown unless he might have her restored to him (*ch. iii. 13*), was a most base and wicked thing, and showed her to have more of Saul's daughter in her than of David's wife or Jonathan's sister.

2. How he replied to her reproach. He did not upbraid her with her treacherous departure from him to embrace the bosom of a stranger. He had forgiven that, and therefore had forgotten it, though, it may be, his own conscience, on this occasion, upbraided him with his folly in receiving her again (for that is said to pollute the land, *Jer. iii. 1*), but he justifies himself in what he did.

(1.) He designed thereby to honour God (v. 21): *It was before the Lord*, and with an eye to him. Whatever invidious construction she was pleased to put upon it, he had the testimony of his conscience for him that he sincerely aimed at the glory of God, for whom he thought he could never do enough. Here he reminds her indeed of the setting aside of her father's house, to make way for him to the throne, that she might not think herself the most proper judge of propriety: "*God chose me before thy father, and appointed me to be ruler over Israel*, and now I am the fountain of honour; and, if the expressions of a warm devotion to God were looked upon as mean and unfashionable in thy father's court, yet *I will play before the Lord*, and thereby bring them into reputation again. And, if this be to be vile (v. 22), *I will be yet more vile.*" Note, [1.] We should be afraid of censuring the devotion of others though it may not agree with our sentiments, because, for aught that we know, the heart may be upright in it, and who are we that we should despise those whom God has accepted? [2.] If we can approve ourselves to God in what we do in religion, and do it as before the Lord, we need not value the censures and reproaches of men. If we appear right in God's eyes, no matter how mean we appear in the eyes of the world. [3.] The more we are vilified for well-doing the more resolute we should be in it, and hold our religion the faster, and bind it the closer to us, for the endeavours of Satan's agents to shake us and to shame us out of it. *I will be yet more vile.*

(2.) He designed thereby to humble himself: "*I will be base in my own sight*, and will think nothing too mean to stoop to for the honour of God." In the throne of judgment, and in the field of battle, none shall do more to support the grandeur and authority of a prince than David shall; but in acts of devotion he lays aside the thoughts of majesty, humbles himself to the dust before the Lord, joins in with the meanest services done in honour of the ark, and thinks all this no

diminution to him. The greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of Jesus Christ.

(3.) He doubted not but even this would turn to his reputation among those whose reproach Michal pretended to fear: *Of the maid-servants shall I be had in honour.* The common people would be so far from thinking the worse of him for these pious condescensions that they would esteem and honour him so much the more. Those that are truly pious are sometimes *manifested in the consciences* even of those that speak ill of them, 2 Cor. v. 11. Let us never be driven from our duty by the fear of reproach; for to be steady and resolute in it will perhaps turn to our reputation more than we think it will. Piety will have its praise. Let us not then be indifferent in it, nor afraid or ashamed to own it.

David was contented thus to justify himself, and did not any further animadvert upon Michal's insolence; but God punished her for it, writing her for ever childless from this time forward, v. 23. She unjustly reproached David for his devotion, and therefore God justly put her under the perpetual reproach of barrenness. *Those that honour God he will honour;* but those that despise him, and his servants and service, *shall be lightly esteemed.*

#### CHAP. VII.

Still the ark is David's care as well as his joy. In this chapter we have, I. His consultation with Nathan about building a house for it; he signifies his purpose to do it (ver. 1, 2) and Nathan approves his purpose, ver. 3. II. His communion with God about it. 1. A gracious message God sent him about it, accepting his purpose, countermanning the performance, and promising him an entail of blessings upon his family, ver. 4-17. 2. A very humble prayer which David offered up to God in return to that gracious message, thankfully accepting God's promises to him, and earnestly praying for the performance of them, ver. 18-29. And, in both these, there is an eye to the Messiah and his kingdom.

AND it came to pass, when the King sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies; 2 That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. 3 And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.

Here is, I. David at rest. *He sat in his house* (v. 1), quiet and undisturbed, having no occasion to take the field: *The Lord had given him rest round about*, from all those that were enemies to his settlement in the throne, and he sets himself to enjoy that rest. Though he was a man of war, he was *for peace* (Ps. cxx. 7) and did not delight in war. He had not been long at rest, nor was it long before he was again engaged in war; but at present he enjoyed a calm, and he was in his element when he was sitting in his house, meditating in the law of God.

II. David's thought of building a temple for the honour of God. He had built a palace for himself and a city for his servants; and

now he thinks of building a habitation for the ark. 1. Thus he would make a grateful return for the honours God put upon him. Note, When God, in his providence, has remarkably done much for us, it should put us upon contriving what we may do for him and his glory. *What shall I render unto the Lord?* 2. Thus he would improve the present calm, and make a good use of the rest God had given him. Now that he was not called out to serve God and Israel in the high places of the field, he would employ his thoughts, and time, and estate, in serving him another way, and not indulge himself in ease, much less in luxury. When God, in his providence, gives us rest, and finds us little to do of worldly business, we must do so much the more for God and our souls. How different were the thoughts of David when he sat in his palace from Nebuchadnezzar's when he *walked in his!* Dan. iv. 29, 30. That proud man thought of nothing but the might of his own power, and the honour of his own majesty; this humble soul is full of contrivance how to glorify God, and give honour to him. And how God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace and glory to the humble, the event showed. David considered (v. 2) the state-*liness of his own habitation (I dwell in a house of cedar)*, and compared with that the mean-*ness of the habitation of the ark (the ark dwells within curtains)*, and thought this incongruous, that he should dwell in a palace and the ark in a tent. David had been uneasy till he found out a place for the ark (Ps. cxxxii. 4, 5), and now he is uneasy till he finds out a better place. Gracious grateful souls, (1.) Never think they can do enough for God, but, when they have done much, are still projecting to do more and devising liberal things. (2.) They cannot enjoy their own accommodations while they see the church of God in distress and under a cloud. David can take little pleasure in a house of cedar for himself, unless the ark have one. Those who *stretched themselves upon beds of ivory*, and were *not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, though they had David's music, had not David's spirit (Amos vi. 4, 6) nor those who dwell in their celled houses while God's house lay waste.

III. His communicating this thought to Nathan the prophet. He told him, as a friend and confidant, whom he used to advise with. Could not David have gone about it himself? Was it not a good work? Was not he himself a prophet? Yes, but *in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.* David told him, that by him he might know the mind of God. It was certainly a good work, but it was uncertain whether it was the will of God that David should have the doing of it.

IV. Nathan's approbation of it: *Go, do all that is in thy heart; for the Lord is with thee*, v. 3. We do not find that David told him that he purposed to build a temple, only that it was a trouble to him that there was not



one built, from which Nathan easily gathered what was in his heart, and bade him go on and prosper. Note, We ought to do all we can to encourage and promote the good purposes and designs of others, and put in a good word, as we have opportunity, to forward a good work. Nathan spoke this, not in God's name, but as from himself; not as a prophet, but as a wise and good man; it was agreeable to the revealed will of God, which requires that all in their places should lay out themselves for the advancement of religion and the service of God, though it seems his secret will was otherwise, that David should not do this. It was Christ's prerogative always to speak the mind of God, which he perfectly knew. Other prophets spoke it only when the spirit of prophecy was upon them; but, if in any thing they mistook (as Samuel, 1 Sam. xvi. 6, and Nathan here) God soon rectified the mistake.

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, 5 Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me a house for me to dwell in? 6 Whereas I have not dwelt in *any* house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. 7 In all *the places* wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me a house of cedar? 8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepecote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: 9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great *men* that *are* in the earth. 10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as before-time, 11 And as since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also

the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee a house. 12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. 17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

We have here a full revelation of God's favour to David and the kind intentions of that favour, the notices and assurances of which God sent him by Nathan the prophet, whom he entrusted to deliver this long message to him. The design of it is to take him off from his purpose of building the temple and it was therefore sent, 1. By the same hand that had given him encouragement to do it, lest, if it had been sent by any other, Nathan should be despised and insulted and David should be perplexed, being encouraged by one prophet and discouraged by another. 2. The same night, that Nathan might not continue long in an error nor David have his head any further filled with thoughts of that which he must never bring to pass. God might have said this to David himself immediately, but he chose to send it by Nathan, to support the honour of his prophets, and to preserve in David a regard to them. Though he be the head, they must be the eyes by which he must see the visions of the Almighty, and the tongue by which he must hear the word of God. He that delivered this long message to Nathan assisted his memory to retain it, that he might deliver it fully (he being resolved to deliver it faithfully) as he received it of the Lord. Now in this message,

1. David's purpose to build God a house is superseded. God took notice of that purpose, for he knows what is in man; and he was well pleased with it, as appears 1 Kings viii. 18, *Thou didst well that it was in thy heart*; yet he forbade him to go on with his purpose (v. 5): "*Shalt thou build me a house?*" No, *thou shalt not* (as it is explained in the

parallel place, 1 Chron. xvii. 4); there is other work appointed for thee to do, which must be done first." David is a man of war, and he must enlarge the borders of Israel, by carrying on their conquests. David is a sweet psalmist, and he must prepare psalms for the use of the temple when it is built, and settle the courses of the Levites; but his son's genius will better suit for building the house, and he will have a better treasure to bear the charge of it, and therefore let it be reserved for him to do. *As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister.* The building of a temple was to be a work of time, and preparation made for it; but it was a thing that had never been spoken of till now. God tells him, 1. That hitherto he had never had a house built for him (v. 6), a tabernacle had served hitherto, and it might serve awhile longer. God regards not outward pomp in his service; his presence was as surely with his people when the ark was in a tent as when it was in a temple. David was uneasy that the ark was in curtains (a mean and movable habitation), but God never complained of it as any uneasiness to him. He did not dwell, but walk, and yet fainted not, nor was weary. Christ, like the ark, when here on earth walked in a tent or tabernacle, for he *went about doing good*, and dwelt not in any house of his own, till he ascended on high, to the mansions above, in his Father's house, and there he sat down. The church, like the ark, in this world is ambulatory, dwells in a tent, because its present state is both pastoral and military; its continuing city is to come. David, in his psalms, often calls the tabernacle a temple (as Ps. v. 7; xxvii. 4; xxix. 9; lxxv. 4; cxxxviii. 2), because it answered the intention of a temple, though it was made but of curtains. Wise and good men value not the show, while they have the substance. David perhaps had more true devotion, and sweeter communion with God, in a house of curtains, than any of his successors in the house of cedar. 2. That he had never given any orders or directions, or the least intimation, to any of the sceptres of Israel, that is, to any of the judges, 1 Chron. xvii. 6 (for rulers are called *sceptres*, Ezek. xix. 14, the great Ruler is called so, Num. xxiv. 17), concerning the building of the temple, v. 7. That worship only is acceptable which is instituted; why should David therefore design what God never ordained? Let him wait for a warrant, and then let him do it. Better a tent of God's appointing than a temple of his own inventing.

II. David is reminded of the great things God had done for him, to let him know that he was a favourite of heaven, though he had not the favour to be employed in this service, as also that God was not indebted to him for his good intentions, but, whatever he did for God's honour, God was beforehand with him, v. 8, 9. 1. He had raised him from a

very mean and low condition: *He took him from the sheep-cote.* It is good for those who have come to great preferment to be often reminded of their small beginnings, that they may always be humble and thankful. 2. He had given him success and victory over his enemies (v. 9): "*I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest*, to protect thee when pursued, to prosper thee when pursuing. *I have cut off all thy enemies*, that stood in the way of thy advancement and settlement." 3. He had crowned him not only with power and dominion in Israel, but with honour and reputation among the nations about: *I have made thee a great name.* He had become famous for his courage, conduct, and great achievements, and was more talked of than any of the great men of his day. A great name is what those who have it have great reason to be thankful for and may improve to good purposes, but what those who have it not have no reason to be ambitious of: a good name is more desirable. A man may pass through the world very obscurely and yet very comfortably.

III. A happy establishment is promised to God's Israel, v. 10, 11. This comes in in a parenthesis, before the promises made to David himself, to let him understand that what God designed to do for him was for Israel's sake, that they might be happy under his administration, and to give him the satisfaction of foreseeing peace upon Israel, when it was promised him that he should *see his children's children*, Ps. cxviii. 6. A good king cannot think himself happy unless his kingdom be so. The promises that follow relate to his family and posterity; these therefore, which speak of the settlement of Israel, intend the happiness of his own reign. Two things are promised:—1. A quiet place: *I will appoint a place for my people Israel.* It was appointed long ago, yet they were disappointed, but now that appointment should be made good. Canaan should be clearly their own without any ejection or molestation. 2. A quiet enjoyment of that place: *The children of wickedness* (meaning especially the Philistines, who had been so long a plague to them) *shall not afflict them any more; but, as in the time that I caused judges to be over my people Israel, I will cause thee to rest from all thy enemies* (so v. 11 may be read), that is, "I will continue and complete that rest; the land shall rest from war, as it did under the judges."

IV. Blessings are entailed upon the family and posterity of David. David had purposed to build God a house, and, in requital, God promises to *build him a house*, v. 11. Whatever we do for God, or sincerely design to do though Providence prevents our doing it, we *shall in no wise lose our reward.* He had promised to make him a name (v. 9); here he promises to make him a house, which should bear up that name. It would be a great satisfaction to David, while he lived, to have

the inviolable assurance of a divine promise that his family should flourish when he was dead. Next to the happiness of our souls, and the church of God, we should desire the happiness of our seed, that those who come of us may be praising God on earth when we are praising him in heaven.

1. Some of these promises relate to Solomon, his immediate successor, and to the royal line of Judah. (1.) That God would advance him to the throne. Those words, *when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers*, intimate that David himself should come to his grave in peace; and then *I will set up thy seed*. This favour was so much the greater because it was more than God had done for Moses, or Joshua, or any of the judges whom he called to feed his people. David's government was the first that was entailed; for the promise made to Christ of the kingdom was to reach to his spiritual seed. *If children, then heirs*. (2.) That he would settle him in the throne: *I will establish his kingdom* (v. 12), *the throne of his kingdom*, v. 13. His title shall be clear and uncontested, his interest confirmed, and his administration steady. (3.) That he would employ him in that good work of building the temple, which David had only the satisfaction of designing: *He shall build a house for my name*, v. 13. The work shall be done, though David shall not have the doing of it. (4.) That he would take him into the covenant of adoption (v. 14, 15): *I will be his father, and he shall be my son*. We need no more to make us and ours happy than to have God to be a Father to us and them; and all those to whom God is a Father he by his grace makes his sons, by giving them the disposition of children. If he be a careful, tender, bountiful Father to us, we must be obedient, tractable, dutiful children to him. The promise here speaks *us unto sons*. [1.] That his Father would correct him when there was occasion; for *what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?* Afflictions are an article of the covenant, and are not only consistent with, but flow from, God's fatherly love. "*If he commit iniquity, as it proved he did* (1 Kings xi. 1), *I will chasten him to bring him to repentance, but it shall be with the rod of men*, such a rod as men may wield—I will not *plead against him with the great power of God*," Job xxiii. 6. Or rather such a rod as *men may bear*—"I will consider his frame, and correct him with all possible tenderness and compassion when there is need, and no more than there is need of; it shall be with *the stripes, the touches* (so the word is) *of the children of men*; not a stroke, or wound, but a gentle touch." [2.] That yet he would not disinherit him (v. 15): *My mercy* (and that is the inheritance of sons) *shall not depart from him*. The revolt of the ten tribes from the house of David was their correction for iniquity, but the constant adherence of the other two to

that family, which was a competent support of the royal dignity, perpetuated the mercy of God to the seed of David, according to this promise; though that family was cut short, yet it was not cut off, as the house of Saul was. Never any other family swayed the sceptre of Judah than that of David. This is that covenant of royalty celebrated (Ps. lxxxix. 3, &c.) as typical of the covenant of redemption and grace.

2. Others of them relate to Christ, who is often called *David* and the *Son of David*, that Son of David to whom these promises pointed and in whom they had their full accomplishment. He was of the *seed of David*, Acts xiii. 23. To him God *gave the throne of his father David* (Luke i. 32), all power both in heaven and earth, and authority to execute judgment. He was to build the gospel temple, a house for God's name, Zech. vi. 12, 13. That promise, *I will be his Father, and he shall be my Son*, is expressly applied to Christ by the apostle, Heb. i. 5. But the establishing of his house, and his throne, and his *kingdom, for ever* (v. 13, and again, and a third time v. 16, *for ever*), can be applied to no other than Christ and his kingdom. David's house and kingdom have long since come to an end; it is only the Messiah's kingdom that is everlasting, and of the *increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*. The supposition of committing iniquity cannot indeed be applied to the Messiah himself, but it is applicable (and very comfortable) to his spiritual seed. True believers have their infirmities, for which they may expect to be corrected, but they shall not be cast off. Every transgression in the covenant will not throw us out of covenant. Now, (1.) This message Nathan faithfully delivered to David (v. 17); though, in forbidding him to build the temple, he contradicted his own words, yet he was not backward to do it when he was better informed concerning the mind of God. (2.) These promises God faithfully performed to David and his seed in due time. Though David came short of making good his purpose to build God a house, yet God did not come short of making good his promise to build him a house. Such is the tenour of the covenant we are under; though there are many failures in our performances, there are none in God's.

18 Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who *am I, O Lord God?* and what *is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* 19 And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And *is this the manner of man, O Lord God?* 20 And what can David say more unto thee?

for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant. 21 For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. 22 Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for *there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.* 23 And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, *even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?* 24 For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel *to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God.* 25 And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish *it for ever, and do as thou hast said.* 26 And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. 27 For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee a house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. 28 And now, O Lord God, thou *art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: 29 Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.*

We have here the solemn address David made to God, in answer to the gracious message God had sent him. We are not told what he said to Nathan; no doubt he received him very kindly and respectfully as God's messenger. But his answer to God he took himself, and did not send by Nathan. When ministers deliver God's message to us, it is not to them, but to God, that our hearts must reply; he understands the language of

the heart, and to him we may come boldly. David had no sooner received the message than, while the impressions of it were fresh, he retired to return an answer. Observe,

I. The place he retired to: He *went in before the Lord*, that is, into the tabernacle where the ark was, which was the token of God's presence; before *that* he presented himself. God's will now is that men pray every where; but, wherever we pray, we must set ourselves as before the Lord and set him before us.

II. The posture he put himself into: He *sat before the Lord*. 1. It denotes the posture of his body. Kneeling or standing is certainly the most proper gesture to be used in prayer; but the Jews, from this instance, say, "It was allowed to the kings of the house of David to sit in the temple, and to no other." But this will by no means justify the ordinary use of that gesture in prayer, whatever may be allowed in a case of necessity. *David went in, and took his place before the Lord*, so it may be read; but, when he prayed, he stood up as the manner was. Or he *went in and continued before the Lord*, staid some time silently meditating, before he began his prayer, and then remained longer than usual in the tabernacle. Or, 2. It may denote the frame of his spirit at this time. He went in, and composed himself before the Lord; thus we should do in all our approaches to God. *O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed.*

III. The prayer itself, which is full of the breathings of pious and devout affection towards God.

1. He speaks very humbly of himself and his own merits. So he begins as one astonished: *Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house?* v. 18. God had reminded him of the meanness of his original (v. 8) and he subscribed to it; he had low thoughts, (1.) Of his personal merits: *Who am I?* He was upon all accounts a very considerable and valuable man. His endowments both of body and mind were extraordinary. His gifts and graces were eminent. He was a man of honour, success, and usefulness, the darling of his country and the dread of its enemies. Yet, when he comes to speak of himself before God, he says, "*Who am I?*" A man not worth taking notice of." (2.) Of the merits of his family: *What is my house?* His house was of the royal tribe, and descended from the prince of that tribe; he was allied to the best families of the country, and yet, like Gideon, thinks his family poor in Judah, and himself *the least in his father's house*, Judg. vi. 15. David thus humbled himself when Saul's daughter was proposed to him for a wife (1 Sam. xviii. 18), but now with much more reason. Note, It very well becomes the greatest and best of men, even in the midst of the highest advancements, to have low and mean thoughts of themselves; for the greatest of men are worms, the best are sinners, and those that are highest ad-

vanced have nothing but what they have received: "*What am I, that thou hast brought me hitherto, brought me to the kingdom, and to a settlement in it, and rest from all my enemies?*" It intimates that he could not have reached this himself by his own management, if God had not brought him to it. All our attainments must be looked upon as God's vouchsafements.

2. He speaks very highly and honourably of God's favours to him. (1.) In what he had done for him: "*Thou hast brought me hitherto, to this great dignity and dominion. Hitherto thou hast helped me.*" Though we should be left at uncertainty concerning further mercy, we have great reason to be thankful for that which has been done for us hitherto, Acts xxvi. 22. (2.) In what he had yet further promised him. God had done great things for him already, and yet, as if those had been nothing, he had promised to do much more, v. 19. Note, What God has laid out upon his people is much, but what he has laid up for them is infinitely more, Ps. xxxi. 19. The present graces and comforts of the saints are invaluable gifts; and yet, as if these were too little for God to bestow upon his children, he has spoken concerning them for a great while to come, even as far as eternity itself reaches. Of this we must own, as David here, [1.] That it is far beyond what we could expect: *Is this the manner of men?* that is, *First*, Can man expect to be so dealt with by his Maker? *Is this the law of Adam?* Note, Considering what the character and condition of man are, it is very surprising and amazing that God should deal with him as he does. Man is a mean creature, and therefore under a law of distance—unprofitable to God, and therefore under a law of disesteem and disregard—guilty and obnoxious, and therefore under a law of death and damnation. But how unlike are God's dealings with man to this law of Adam! He is brought near to God, purchased at a high rate, taken into covenant and communion with God; could this ever have been thought of? *Secondly*, Do men usually deal thus with one another? No, the way of our God is far above the manner of men. Though he be high, he has respect to the lowly; and is this the manner of men? Though he is offended by us, he beseeches us to be reconciled, waits to be gracious, multiplies his pardons: and is this the manner of men? Some give another sense of this, reading it thus: *And this is the law of man, the Lord Jehovah*, that is, "This promise of one whose kingdom shall be established for ever must be understood of one that is a man and yet the Lord Jehovah, this must be the law of such a one. A Messiah from my loins must be man, but, reigning for ever, must be God." [2.] That beyond this there is nothing we can desire: "*And what can David say more unto thee?*" v. 20. What can I ask or wish for more?

*Thou, Lord, knowest thy servant*, knowest what will make me happy, and what thou hast promised is enough to do so." The promise of Christ includes all. If that man, the Lord God, be ours, what can we ask or think of more? Eph. iii. 20. The promises of the covenant of grace are framed by him that knows us, and therefore knows how to adapt them to every branch of our necessity. He knows us better than we know ourselves; and therefore let us be satisfied with the provision he has made for us. What can we say more for ourselves in our prayers than he has said for us in his promises?

3. He ascribes all to the free grace of God (v. 21), both the great things he had done for him and the great things he had made known to him. All was, (1.) For his word's sake, that is, for the sake of Christ the eternal Word; it is all owing to his merit. Or, "That thou mayest magnify thy word of promise above all thy name, in making it the stay and store-house of thy people." (2.) According to thy own heart, thy gracious counsels and designs, *ex mero motu—of thy own good pleasure*. Even so, *Father*, because it seemed good in thy eyes. All that God does for his people in his providences, and secures to them in his promises, is for his pleasure and for his praise, the pleasure of his will and the praise of his word.

4. He adores the greatness and glory of God (v. 22): *Thou art great, O Lord God! for there is none like thee*. God's gracious condescension to him, and the honour he had put upon him, did not at all abate his awful veneration for the divine Majesty; for the nearer any are brought to God the more they see of his glory, and the dearer we are in his eyes the greater he should be in ours. And this we acknowledge concerning God, that there is no being like him, nor any God besides him, and that what we have seen with our eyes of his power and goodness is according to all that we have heard with our ears, and the one half not told us.

5. He expresses a great esteem for the Israel of God, v. 23, 24. As there was none among the gods to be compared with Jehovah, so none among the nations to be compared with Israel, considering,

(1.) The works he had done for them. He went to redeem them, applied himself to it as a great work, went about it with solemnity. *Elohim halecu, dii verunt—Gods went*, as if there was the same consultation and concurrence of all the persons in the blessed Trinity about the work of redemption that there was about the work of creation, when God said, *Let us make man. Whom those that were sent of God went to redeem*; so the Chaldee, meaning, I suppose, Moses and Aaron. The redemption of Israel, as described here, was typical of our redemption by Christ in that, [1.] They were redeemed from the nations and their gods; so are we from all iniquity and all conformity to this

present world. Christ came to save his people from their sins. [2.] They were redeemed to be a peculiar people unto God, purified and appropriated to himself, that he might make himself a great name and do for them great things. The honour of God, and the eternal happiness of the saints, are the two things aimed at in their redemption.

(2) The covenant he had made with them, v. 24. It was, [1.] Mutual: "They to be a people to thee, and thou to be a God to them; all their interests consecrated to thee, and all thy attributes engaged for them." [2.] Immutable: "Thou hast confirmed them." He that makes the covenant makes it sure and will make it good.

6. He concludes with humble petitions to God. (1.) He grounds his petitions upon the message which God had sent him (v. 27): *Thou hast revealed this to thy servant*, that is, "Thou hast of thy own good will given me the promise that thou wilt build me a house, else I could never have found in my heart to pray such a prayer as this. I durst not have asked such great things if I had not been directed and encouraged by thy promise to ask them. They are indeed too great for me to beg, but not too great for thee to give. Thy servant has found in his heart to pray this prayer;" so it is in the original, and the LXX. Many, when they go to pray, have their hearts to seek, but David's heart was found, that is, it was fixed, gathered in from its wanderings, and entirely engaged to the duty and employed in it. That prayer which is found in the tongue only will not please God; it must be found in the heart; the heart must be lifted up and poured out before God. *My son, give God thy heart.* (2.) He builds his faith and hopes to speed upon the fidelity of God's promise (v. 25): "*Thou art that God* (thou art he, even *that God*, the *Lord of hosts*, and *God of Israel*, or *that God whose words are true*, that God whom one may depend upon); and *thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant*, which I am therefore bold to pray for." (3.) Thence he fetches the matter of his prayer, and refers to that as the guide of his prayers. [1.] He prays for the performance of God's promise (v. 25): "Let the word he made good to me, *on which thou hast caused me to hope* (Ps. exix. 49) and *do as thou hast said*; I desire no more, and I expect no less; so full is the promise, and so firm." Thus we must turn God's promises into prayers, and then they shall be turned into performances; for, with God, saying and doing are not two things, as they often are with men. God will do as he hath said. [2.] He prays for the glorifying of God's name (v. 26): *Let thy name be magnified for ever.* This ought to be the summary and centre of all our prayers, the Alpha and the Omega of them. Begin with *Hallowed be thy name*, and end with *Thine is the glory for ever.* "Whether I be magnified or no, *let thy name be magnified.*" And he reckons that

nothing magnifies God's name more than this, to say, with suitable affections, *The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel.* This bespeaks the *God of Israel gloriously great*, that he is the *Lord of hosts*; and this bespeaks the *Lord of hosts gloriously good*, that he is *God over Israel.* In both, *let his name be magnified for ever.* Let all the creatures and all the churches give him the glory of these two. David desired the performance of God's promise for the honour, not of his own name, but of God's. Thus the Son of David prayed, *Father, glorify thy name* (John xii. 28), and (John xvii. 1), *Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee.* [3.] He prays for his house, for to that the promise has special reference, *First*, That it might be happy (v. 29): *Let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant*; and again, *with thy blessing.* "Let the house of thy servant be truly and eternally blessed. *Those whom thou blessest are blessed indeed.*" The care of good men is very much concerning their families; and the best entail on their families is that of the blessing of God. The repetition of this request is not a vain repetition, but expressive of the value he had of the divine blessing, and his earnest desire of it, as all in all to the happiness of his family. *Secondly*, That the happiness of it might remain: "Let it be *established before thee* (v. 26); let it *continue for ever before thee,*" v. 29. He prayed, 1. That the entail of the crown might not be cut off, but remain in his family, that none of his might ever forfeit it, but that they might walk before God, which would be their establishment. 2. That his kingdom might have its perfection and perpetuity in the kingdom of the Messiah. When Christ for ever sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. x. 12), and received all possible assurance that his seed and throne shall be as the days of heaven, this prayer of David the son of Jesse for his seed was abundantly answered, that it might *continue before God for ever.* See Ps. lxxii. 17. The perpetuity of the Messiah's kingdom is the desire and faith of all good people.

#### CHAP. VIII.

David having sought first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, settling the ark as soon as he was himself well settled, we are here told how all other things were added to him. Here is an account, 1. Of his conquests. He triumphed, 1. Over the Philistines, ver. 1. 2. Over the Moabites, ver. 2. 3. Over the king of Zobah, ver. 3, 4. 4. Over the Syrians, ver. 5-8, 13. 5. Over the Edomites, ver. 14. 11. Of the presents that were brought him and the wealth he got from the nations he subdued, which he dedicated to God, ver. 9-12. 11. Of his court, the administration of his government (ver. 15), and his chief officers, ver. 16-18. This gives us a general idea of the prosperity of David's reign.

AND after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them: and David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines. 2 And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to

put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts. 3 David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates. 4 And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for a hundred chariots. 5 And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer, king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. 6 Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went. 7 And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 And from Bethah, and from Beerothai, cities of Hadadezer, king David took exceeding much brass.

God had given David rest from all his enemies that opposed him and made head against him; and he, having made a good use of that rest, has now commission given him to make war upon them, and to act offensively for the avenging of Israel's quarrels and the recovery of their rights; for as yet they were not in full possession of that country to which by the promise of God they were entitled.

I. He quite subdued the Philistines, *v.* 1. They had attacked him when they thought him weak (*ch.* v. 17), and went by the worst then; but, when he found himself strong, he attacked them, and made himself master of their country. They had long been vexatious and oppressive to Israel. Saul got no ground against them; but David completed Israel's deliverance out of their hands, which Samson had begun long before, *Judg.* xiii. 5. *Metheg-ammah* was *Gath* (the chief and royal city of the Philistines) and the towns belonging to it, among which there was a constant garrison kept by the Philistines on the hill Ammah (*2 Sam.* ii. 24), which was *Metheg*, a *bridle* (so it signifies) or *curb* upon the people of Israel; this David took out of their hand and used it as a curb upon them. Thus, when the strong man is disarmed, the armour wherein he trusted is taken from him, and used against him, *Luke* xi. 22. And after the long and frequent struggles which the saints have had with the powers of darkness, like Israel with the Philistines, the

Son of David shall tread them all under their feet and make the saints more than conquerors.

II. He smote the Moabites, and made them tributaries to Israel, *v.* 2. He divided the country into three parts, two of which he destroyed, casting down the strong-holds, and putting all to the sword; the third part he spared, to till the ground and be servants to Israel. Dr. Lightfoot says, "He laid them on the ground and measured them with a cord, who should be slain and who should live;" and this is called *meting out the valley of Succoth*, *Ps.* lx. 6. The Jews say he used this severity with the Moabites because they had slain his parents and brethren, whom he put under the protection of the king of Moab during his exile, *1 Sam.* xxii. 3, 4. He did it in justice, because they had been dangerous enemies to the Israel of God; and in policy, because, if left in their strength, they still would have been so. But observe, Though it was necessary that two-thirds should be cut off; yet the line that was to keep alive, though it was but one, is ordered to be a full line. Be sure to give that length enough; let the line of mercy be stretched to the utmost *in favorem vite—so as to favour life*. Acts of indemnity must be construed so as to enlarge the favour. Now Balaam's prophecy was fulfilled, *A sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab*, to the utmost of which the fatal line extended, *Num.* xxiv. 17. The Moabites continued tributaries to Israel till after the death of Ahab, *2 Kings* iii. 4, 5. Then they rebelled and were never reduced.

III. He smote the Syrians or Aramites. Of them there were two distinct kingdoms, as we find them spoken of in the title of the 60th Psalm: *Aram Naharaim, — Syria of the rivers*, whose head city was Damascus (famed for its rivers, *2 Kings* v. 12), and *Aram Zobah*, which joined to it, but extended to Euphrates. These were the two northern crowns. 1. David began with the Syrians of Zobah, *v.* 3, 4. As he went to settle his border at the river Euphrates (for so far the land conveyed by the divine grant to Abraham and his seed did extend, *Gen.* xv. 18), the king of Zobah opposed him, being himself possessed of those countries which belonged to Israel; but David routed his forces, and took his chariots and horsemen. The horsemen are here said to be 700, but *1 Chron.* xviii. 4 they are said to be 7000. If they divided their horse by ten in a company, as it is probable they did, the captains and companies were 700, but the horsemen were 7000. David houghed the horses, cut the sinews of their hams, and so lamed them, and made them unserviceable, at least in war, God having forbidden them to *multiply horses*, *Deut.* xvii. 16. David reserved only 100 chariots out of 1000 for his own use: for he placed his strength not in chariots nor horses, but in the living

God (Ps. xx. 7), and wrote it from his own observation that a horse is a vain thing for safety, Ps. xxxiii. 16, 17. 2. The Syrians of Damascus coming in to the relief of the king of Zobah fell with him. 22,000 were slain in the field, v. 5. So that it was easy for David to make himself master of the country, and garrison it for himself, v. 6. The enemies of God's church, that think to secure themselves, will prove, in the end, to ruin themselves, by their confederacies with each other. *Associate yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces*, Isa. viii. 9.

IV. In all these wars, 1. David was protected: *The Lord preserved him whithersoever he went*. It seems, he went in person, and, in the cause of God and Israel, jeopardied his own life in the high places of the field; but God covered his head in the day of battle, which he often speaks of, in his psalms, to the glory of God. 2. He was enriched. He took the shields of gold which the servants of Hadadezer had in their custody (v. 7) and much brass from several cities of Syria (v. 8), which he was entitled to, not only *jure belli*—by the uncontrollable right of the longest sword ("Get it, and take it"); but by commission from heaven, and the ancient entail of these countries on the seed of Abraham.

9 When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, 10 Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass: 11 Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued; 12 Of Syria, and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah. 13 And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men. 14 And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

Here is, 1. The court made to David by the king of Hamath, who, it seems was at this time at war with the king of Zobah.

He, hearing of David's success against his enemy, sent his own son ambassador to him (v. 9, 10), to congratulate him on his victory, to return him thanks for the favour he had done him in breaking the power of one he was in fear of, and to beg his friendship. Thus he not only secured but strengthened himself. And David lost nothing by taking this little prince under his protection, any more than the old Romans did by the like policy; for the wealth he had from the countries he conquered by way of spoil he had from this by way of present or gratuity: *Vessels of silver and gold*. Better get by composition than by compulsion. 2. The offering David made to God of the spoils of the nations and all the rich things that were brought him. He dedicated all to the Lord, v. 11, 12. This crowned all his victories, and made them far to out-shine Alexander's or Cæsar's, that they sought their own glory, but he aimed at the glory of God. All the precious things he was master of were dedicated things, that is, they were designed for the building of the temple; and a good omen it was of kindness to the Gentiles in the fulness of time, and of the making of God's house a house of prayer for all people, that the temple was built of the spoils and presents of Gentile nations, in allusion to which we find *the kings of the earth bringing their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem*, Rev. xxi. 24. Their gods of gold David burnt (2 Sam. v. 21), but their vessels of gold he dedicated. Thus in the conquest of a soul, by the grace of the Son of David, what stands in opposition to God must be destroyed, every lust mortified and crucified, but what may glorify him must be dedicated and the property of it altered. Even the merchandise and the hire must be *holiness to the Lord* (Isa. xxiii. 18), the gain *consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth* (Mic. iv. 13), and then it is truly our own and that most comfortably. 3. The reputation he got, in a particular manner, by his victory over the Syrians and their allies the Edomites, who acted in conjunction with them, as appears by comparing the title of the 60th Psalm, which was penned on this occasion, with v. 13. *He got himself a name* for all that conduct and courage which are the praise of a great and distinguished general. Something extraordinary, it is likely, there was in that action, which turned very much to his honour, yet he is careful to transfer the honour to God, as appears by the psalm he penned on this occasion, v. 12. It is through God that we do valiantly. 4. His success against the Edomites. They all became David's servants, v. 14. Now, and not till now, Isaac's blessing was accomplished, by which Jacob was made Esau's Lord (Gen. xxvii. 37—40) and the Edomites continued long tributary to the kings of Judah, as the Moabites were to the kings of Israel, till, in Joram's time, they revolted (2 Chron. xxi. 8) as Isaac had there foretold



that Esau should, in process of time, break the yoke from off his neck. Thus David by his conquests, (1.) Secured peace to his son, that he might have time to build the temple. And, (2.) Procured wealth for his son, that he might have wherewith to build it. God employs his servants variously, some in one employment, others in another, some in the spiritual battles, others in the spiritual buildings; and one prepares work for the other, that God may have the glory of all. All David's victories were typical of the success of the gospel against the kingdom of Satan, in which the Son of David rode forth, conquering and to conquer, and he shall reign till he has brought down all opposing rule, principality, and power: and he has, as David had (v. 2), a line to kill and a line to save; for the same gospel is to some a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death.

15 And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people. 16 And Joab the son of Zeruiah *was* over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahihud *was* recorder; 17 And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, *were* the priests; and Seraiah *was* the scribe; 18 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief rulers.

David was not so engaged in his wars abroad as to neglect the administration of the government at home.

I. His care extended itself to all the parts of his dominion: *He reigned over all Israel* (v. 15); not only he had a right to reign over all the tribes, but he did so; they were all safe under his protection, and shared in the fruits of his good government.

II. He did justice with an unbiassed unshaken hand: *He executed judgment unto all his people*, neither did wrong nor denied or delayed right to any. This intimates, 1. His industry and close application to business, his easiness of access and readiness to admit all addresses and appeals made to him. All his people, even the meanest, and those too of the meanest tribes, were welcome to his council-board. 2. His impartiality and the equity of his proceedings, in administering justice. He never perverted justice though favour or affection, nor had respect of persons in judgment. Herein he was a type of Christ, who was faithful and true, and who doth in *righteousness both judge and make war*, Rev. xix. 11. See Ps. lxxii. 1, 2.

III. He kept good order and good officers in his court. David being the first king that had an established government (for Saul's reign was short and unsettled) he had the modelling of the administration. In Saul's time we read of no other great officer than

Abner, that was captain of the host. But David appointed more officers. Here are, 1. Two military officers: Joab that was general of the forces in the field, and Benaiah that was over the Cherethites and Pelethites, who were either the city train-bands (*archers and slingers*, so the Chaldee), or rather the life-guards, or standing force, that attended the king's person, the pretorian band, the militia. They were ready to do service at home, to assist in the administering of justice, and to preserve the public peace. We find them employed in proclaiming Solomon, 1 Kings i. 38. 2. Two ecclesiastical officers: *Zadok and Ahimelech were priests*, that is, they were most employed in the priests' work under Abiathar, the high priest. 3. Two civil officers: one that was recorder, or remembrancer, to put the king in mind of business in its season (he was prime minister of state, yet not entrusted with the custody of the king's conscience, as they say of our lord chancellor, but only of the king's memory; let the king be put in mind of business and he would do it himself); another that was scribe, or secretary of state, that drew up public orders and despatches, and recorded judgments given. 4. David's sons, as they grew up to be fit for business, were made chief rulers; they had places of honour and trust assigned them, in the household, or in the camp, or in the courts of justice, according as their genius led them. They were chief about the king (so it is explained, 1 Chron. xviii. 17), employed near him, that they might be under his eye. Our Lord Jesus has appointed officers in his kingdom, for his honour and the good of the community; when he ascended on high *he gave these gifts* (Eph. iv. 8—11), *to every man his work*, Mark xiii. 34. David made his sons chief rulers; but all believers, Christ's spiritual seed, are better preferred, for they are *made to our God kings and priests*, Rev. i. 6.

#### CHAP. IX.

The only thing recorded in this chapter is the kindness David showed to Jonathan's seed for his sake. I. The kind enquiry he made after the remains of the house of Saul, and his discovery of Mephiboseth, ver. 1—4. II. The kind reception he gave to Mephiboseth, when he was brought to him, ver. 5—8. III. The kind provision he made for him and his, ver. 9—13.

AND David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? 2 And *there was* of the house of Saul a servant whose name *was* Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, *Art* thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant *is* he. 3 And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, *which is* lame on his

feet. 4 And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodabar. 5 Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lodabar. 6 Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! 7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. 8 And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

Here is, I. David's enquiry after the remains of the ruined house of Saul, v. 1. This was a great while after his accession to the throne, for it should seem that Mephibosheth, who was but five years old when Saul died, had now a son born, v. 12. David had too long forgotten his obligations to Jonathan, but now, at length, they are brought to his mind. It is good sometimes to bethink ourselves whether there be any promises or engagements that we have neglected to make good; better do it late than never. The compendium which Paul gives us of the life of David is this (Acts xiii. 36), that he *serred his generation according to the will of God*, that is, he was a man that made it his business to do good; witness this instance, where we may observe,

1. That he sought an opportunity to do good. He might perhaps have satisfied his conscience with the performance of his promise to Jonathan if he had been only ready, upon request or application made to him by any of his seed, to help and succour them. But he does more, he enquires of those about him first (v. 1), and, when he met with a person that was likely to inform him, asked him particularly, *Is there any yet left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness?* v. 3. "Is there any, not only to whom I may do justice (Num. v. 8), but to whom I may show kindness?" Note, Good men should seek opportunities of doing good. *The liberal deviseth liberal things*, Isa. xxxii. 8. For, the most proper objects of our kindness and charity are such as will not be frequently met with without enquiry. The most necessitous are the least clamorous.

2. Those he enquired after were the remains of the house of Saul, to whom he would show kindness for Jonathan's sake: *Is there*

*any left of the house of Saul?* Saul had a very numerous family (1 Chron. viii. 33), enough to replenish a country, and was yet so emptied that none of it appeared; but it was a matter of enquiry, *Is there any left?* See how the providence of God can empty full families, see how the sin of man will do it. Saul's was a bloody house, no marvel it was thus reduced, ch. xxi. 1. But, though God visited the iniquity of the father upon the children, David would not. "Is there any left that I can show kindness to, not for Saul's own sake, but for Jonathan's?" (1.) Saul was David's sworn enemy, and yet he would show kindness to his house with all his heart and was forward to do it. He does not say, "Is there any left of the house of Saul, that I may find some way to take them off, and prevent their giving disturbance to me or my successor?" It was against Abimelech's mind that any one was left of the house of Gideon (Judg. ix. 5), and against Athaliah's mind that any one was left of the seed royal, 2 Chron. xxii. 10, 11. Those were usurped governments. David's needed no such vile supports. He was desirous to show kindness to the house of Saul, not only because he trusted in God and feared not what they could do unto him, but because he was of a charitable disposition and forgave what they had done to him. Note, We must evince the sincerity of our forgiving those that have been any way unjust or injurious to us by being ready, as we have opportunity, to show kindness both to them and theirs. We must not only not avenge ourselves upon them, but we must love them, and *do them good* (Matt. v. 44), and not be backward to do any office of love and good-will to those that have done us many an injury. 1 Pet. iii. 9,—*but, contrariwise, blessing*. This is the way to overcome evil, and to find mercy for ourselves and ours, when we or they need it. (2.) Jonathan was David's sworn friend, and therefore he would show kindness to his house. This teaches us, [1.] To be mindful of our covenant. The kindness we have promised we must conscientiously perform, though it should not be claimed. God is faithful to us; let us not be unfaithful to one another. [2.] To be mindful of our friendships, our old friendships. Note, Kindness to our friends, even to them and theirs, is one of the laws of our holy religion. *He that has friends must show himself friendly*, Prov. xviii. 24. If Providence has raised us, and our friends and their families are brought low, yet we must not forget former acquaintance, but rather look upon that as giving us so much the fairer opportunity of being kind to them: then our friends have most need of us and we are in the best capacity to help them. Though there be not a solemn league of friendship tying us to this constancy of love, yet there is a sacred law of friendship no less obliging, that to him that is in misery pity should be shown by his friend, Job vi.

14. *A brother is born for adversity.* Friendship obliges us to take cognizance of the families and surviving relations of those we have loved, who, when they left us, left behind them their bodies, their names, and their posterity, to be kind to.

3. The kindness he promised to show them he calls the *kindness of God*; not only great kindness, but, (1.) Kindness in pursuance of the covenant that was between him and Jonathan, to which God was a witness. See 1 Sam. xx. 42. (2.) Kindness after God's example; for we must be merciful as he is. He spares those whom he has advantage against, and so must we. Jonathan's request to David was (1 Sam. xx. 14, 15), "*Show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, and the same to my seed.*" The kindness of God is some greater instance of kindness than one can ordinarily expect from men. (3.) It is kindness done after a godly sort, and with an eye to God, and his honour and favour.

II. Information given him concerning Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Ziba was an old retainer to Saul's family, and knew the state of it. He was sent for and examined, and informed the king that Jonathan's son was living, but *lame* (how he came to be so we read before, *ch.* iv. 4), and that he lived in obscurity, probably among his mother's relations in Lo-debar, in Gilead, on the other side Jordan, where he was *forgotten, as a dead man out of mind*, but bore this obscurity the more easily because he could remember little of the honour he fell from.

III. The bringing of him to court. The king sent (Ziba, it is likely) to bring him up to Jerusalem with all convenient speed, *v.* 5. Thus he eased Machir of his trouble, and perhaps recompensed him for what he had laid out on Mephibosheth's account. This Machir appears to have been a very generous free-hearted man, and to have entertained Mephibosheth, not out of any disaffection to David or his government, but in compassion to the reduced son of a prince, for afterwards we find him kind to David himself when he fled from Absalom. He is named (*ch.* xvii. 27) among those that furnished the king with what he wanted at Mahanaim, though David, when he sent for Mephibosheth from him, little thought that the time would come when he himself would gladly be beholden to him: and perhaps Machir was then the more ready to help David in recompence for his kindness to Mephibosheth. Therefore we should be forward to give, because we know not but we ourselves may some time be in want, *Eccl.* xi. 2. *And he that watereth shall be watered also himself*, *Prov.* xi. 25. Now,

1. Mephibosheth presented himself to David with all the respect that was due to his character. *Lame* as he was, *he fell on his face, and did homage*, *v.* 6. David had thus made his honours to Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, when he was next to the throne (1 Sam. xx. 41, *he bowed himself to him three times*),

and now Mephibosheth, in like manner, addresses him, when affairs are so completely reversed. Those who, when they are in inferior relations, show respect, shall, when they come to be advanced, have respect shown to them.

2. David received him with all the kindness that could be. (1.) He spoke to him as one surprised, but pleased to see him. "Mephibosheth! Why, is there such a man living?" He remembered his name, for it is probable that he was born about the time of the intimacy between him and Jonathan. (2.) He bade him not be afraid: *Fear not, v.* 7. It is probable that the sight of David put him into some confusion, to free him from which he assures him that he sent for him, not out of any jealousy he had of him, nor with any bad design upon him, but to show him kindness. Great men should not take a pleasure in the timorous approaches of their inferiors (for the great God does not), but should encourage them. (3.) He gives him, by grant from the crown, *all the land of Saul his father*, that is, his paternal estate, which was forfeited by Ishbosheth's rebellion and added to his own revenue. This was a real favour, and more than giving him a kind word. True friendship will be generous. (4.) Though he had thus given him a good estate, sufficient to maintain him, yet for Jonathan's sake (whom perhaps he saw some resemblance of in Mephibosheth's face), he will take him to be a constant guest at his own table, where he will not only be comfortably fed, but have company and attendance suitable to his birth and quality. Though Mephibosheth was lame and unsightly, and does not appear to have had any great fitness for business, yet, for his good father's sake, David took him to be one of his family.

3. Mephibosheth accepts this kindness with great humility and self-abasement. He was not one of those that take every favour as a debt, and think every thing too little that their friends do for them; but, on the contrary, speaks as one amazed at the grants David made him (*v.* 8): *What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?* How does he vilify himself! Though the son of a prince, and the grandson of a king, yet his family being under guilt and wrath, and himself poor and lame, he calls himself a *dead dog* before David. Note, It is good to have the heart humble under humbling providences. If, when divine Providence brings our condition down, divine grace brings our spirits down with it, we shall be easy. And those who thus humble themselves shall be exalted. How does he magnify David's kindness! It would have been easy to lessen it if he had been so disposed. Had David restored him his father's estate? It was but giving him his own. Did he take him to his table? This was policy, that he might have an eye upon him. But Mephibosheth considered all that

David said and did as very kind, and himself as less than the least of all his favours. See 1 Sam. xviii. 18.

9 Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. 10 Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11 Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons. 12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwell in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. 13 So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table: and was lame on both his feet.

The matter is here settled concerning Mephibosheth. 1. This grant of his father's estate is confirmed to him, and Ziba called to be a witness to it (v. 9); and, it should seem, Saul had a very good estate, for his father was a mighty man of substance (1 Sam. ix. 1), and he had fields and vineyards to bestow, 1 Sam. xxii. 7. Be it ever so much, Mephibosheth is now master of it all. 2. The management of the estate is committed to Ziba, who knew what it was and how to make the most of it, in whom, having been his father's servant, he might confide, and who, having a numerous family of sons and servants, had hands sufficient to be employed about it, v. 10. Thus Mephibosheth is made very easy, having a good estate without care, and is in a fair way of being very rich, having much coming in and little occasion to spend, himself being kept at David's table. Yet he must have food to eat besides his own bread, provisions for his son and servants; and Ziba's sons and servants would come in for their share of his revenue, for which reason perhaps their number is here mentioned, fifteen sons and twenty servants, who would require nearly all there was; for as goods are increased those are increased that eat them, and what good has the owner thereof save the beholding of them with his eyes? Eccl. v. 11. All that dwell in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth (v. 12), that is, they

all lived upon him, and made a prey of his estate, under pretence of waiting on him and doing him service. The Jews have a saying, "He that multiplies servants multiplies thieves." Ziba is now pleased, for he loves wealth, and will have abundance. "As the king has commanded, so will thy servant do, v. 11. Let me alone with the estate: and as for Mephibosheth" (they seem to be Ziba's words), "if the king please, he need not trouble the court, he shall eat at my table, and be as well treated as one of the king's sons." But David will have him at his own table, and Mephibosheth is as well pleased with his post as Ziba with his. How unfaithful Ziba was to him we shall find afterwards, ch. xvi. 3. Now because David was a type of Christ, his Lord and son, his root and offspring, let his kindness to Mephibosheth serve to illustrate the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards fallen man, which yet he was under no obligation to, as David was to Jonathan. Man was convicted of rebellion against God, and, like Saul's house, under a sentence of rejection from him, was not only brought low and impoverished, but lame and impotent, made so by the fall. The Son of God enquires after this degenerate race, that enquired not after him, comes to seek and save them. To those of them that humble themselves before him, and commit themselves to him, he restores the forfeited inheritance, he entitles them to a better paradise than that which Adam lost, and takes them into communion with himself, sets them with his children at his table, and feasts them with the dainties of heaven. Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus magnify him!

## CHAP. X.

This chapter gives us an account of a war David had with the Ammonites and the Syrians their allies, with the occasion and success of it. I. David sent a friendly embassy to Hanun king of the Ammonites, ver. 1, 2. He, upon a base surmise that it was ill intended, abused David's ambassadors, ver. 3, 4. III. David resenting it (ver. 5), the Ammonites prepared for war against him, ver. 6. IV. David carried the war into their country, sent against them, Jash and Abisai, who addressed themselves to the battle with a great deal of roduct and bravery, ver. 7, 12. V. The Ammonites, and the Syrians their allies, were totally routed, ver. 13, 14. VI. The forces of the Syrians, which rallied again, were a second time defeated, ver. 15-19. Thus did David advance his own reputation for gratitude, in returning kindness, and for justice, in repaying injuries.

AND it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. 2 Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon. 3 And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath

sent comforters unto thee? hath not David *rather* sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it? 4 Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, *even* to their buttocks, and sent them away. 5 When they told *it* unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and *then* return.

Here is, I. The great respect David paid to his neighbour, the king of the Ammonites, v. 1, 2. 1. The inducement to it was some kindness he had formerly received from Nahash the deceased king. He *showed kindness to me*, says David (v. 2), and therefore (having lately had satisfaction in showing kindness to Mephibosheth for his father's sake) he resolves to show kindness to his son, and to keep up a friendly correspondence with him. Thus the pleasure of doing one kind and generous action should excite us to another. Nahash had been an enemy to Israel, a cruel enemy (1 Sam. xi. 2), and yet had shown kindness to David, perhaps only in contradiction to Saul, who was unkind to him: however, if David receives kindness, he is not nice in examining the grounds and principles of it, but resolves gratefully to return it. If a Pharisee give alms in pride, though God will not reward him, yet he that receives the alms ought to return thanks for it. God knows the heart, but we do not. 2. The particular instance of respect was sending an embassy to condole with him on his father's death, as is common among princes in alliance with each other: *David sent to comfort him*. Note, It is a comfort to children, when their parents are dead, to find that their parents' friends are theirs, and that they intend to keep up an acquaintance with them. It is a comfort to mourners to find that there are those who mourn with them, are sensible of their loss and share with them in it. It is a comfort to those who are honouring the memory of their deceased relations to find there are others who likewise honour it and who had a value for those whom they valued.

II. The great affront which Hanun the king of the Ammonites put upon David in his ambassadors. 1. He hearkened to the spiteful suggestions of his princes, who insinuated that David's ambassadors, under pretence of being comforters, were sent as spies, v. 3. False men are ready to think others as false as themselves; and those that hear ill-will to their neighbours are resolved not to believe that their neigh-

bours bear any good-will to them. They would not thus have imagined that David dissembled but that they were conscious to themselves that they could have dissembled, to serve a turn. Unfounded suspicion argues a wicked mind. Bishop Patrick's note on this is that "there is nothing so well meant but it may be ill interpreted, and is wont to be so by men who love nobody but themselves." Men of the greatest honour and virtue must not think it strange if they be thus misrepresented. *Charity thinketh no evil*. 2. Entertaining this vile suggestion, he basely abused David's ambassadors, like a man of a sordid villanous spirit, that was fitter to rake a kennel than to wear a crown. If he had any reason to suspect that David's messengers came on a bad design, he would have done prudently enough to be upon the reserve with them, and to dismiss them as soon as he could; but it is plain he only sought an occasion to put the utmost disgrace he could upon them, out of an antipathy to their king and their country. They were themselves men of honour, and much more so as they represented the prince that sent them; they and their reputation were under the special protection of the law of nations; they put a confidence in the Ammonites, and came among them unarmed; yet Hanun used them like rogues and vagabonds, and worse, *shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the midst*, to expose them to the contempt and ridicule of his servants, that they might make sport with them, and that these men might seem vile.

III. David's tender concern for his servants that were thus abused. He sent to meet them, and to let them know how much he interested himself in their quarrel and how soon he would avenge it, and directed them to stay at Jericho, a private place, where they would not have occasion to come into company, till that half of their beards which was shaved off had grown to such a length that the other half might be decently cut to it, v. 5. The Jews wore their beards long, reckoning it an honour to appear aged and grave; and therefore it was not fit that persons of their rank and figure should appear at court unlike their neighbours. Change of raiment, it is likely, they had with them, to put on, instead of that which was cut off; but the loss of their beards would not be so soon repaired; yet in time these would grow again, and all would be well. Let us learn not to lay too much to heart unjust reproaches; after awhile they will wear off of themselves, and turn only to the shame of their authors, while the injured reputation in a little time grows again, as these beards did. God will *bring forth thy righteousness as the light*, therefore *wait patiently for him*, Ps. xxxvii. 6, 7.

Some have thought that David, in the indignity he received from the king of Am-

mon, was but well enough served for courting and complimenting that pagan prince, whom he knew to be an inveterate enemy to Israel, and might now remember how, when he would have put out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-Gilead, he designed that, as he did this, for a *reproach upon all Israel*, 1 Sam. xi. 2. What better usage could he expect from such a spiteful family and people? Why should he covet the friendship of a people whom Israel must have so little to do with as that an Ammonite might not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation? Deut. xxiii. 3.

6 And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ish-tob twelve thousand men. 7 And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men. 8 And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and Ish-tob, and Maacah, were by themselves in the field. 9 When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians: 10 And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. 11 And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee. 12 Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good. 13 And Joab drew nigh, and the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him. 14 And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem.

Here we have, I. The preparation which

the Ammonites made for war, v. 6. They saw they had made themselves very odious to David and obnoxious to his just displeasure. This they might easily have foreseen when they abused his ambassadors, which was no other than a challenge to war, and a bold defiance of him. Yet, it seems, they had not considered how unable they were, with their thousands, to meet his; for now they found themselves an unequal match, and were forced to hire forces of other nations into their service. Thus sinners daringly provoke God, and expose themselves to his wrath, and never consider that he is *stronger than they*, 1 Cor. x. 22. The Ammonites gave the affront first, and they were the first that raised forces to justify it. Had they humbled themselves, and begged David's pardon, probably an honorary satisfaction might have atoned for the offence. But, when they were thus desperately resolved to stand by what they had done, they courted their own ruin.

II. The speedy descent which David's forces made upon them, v. 7. When David heard of their military preparations, he sent Joab with a great army to attack them, v. 7. Those that are at war with the Son of David not only give the provocation, but begin the war; for he *wants to be gracious*, but they *strengthen themselves against him*, and therefore, *if they turn not, he will whet his sword*, Ps. vii. 12. God has forces to send against those that set his wrath at defiance (Isa. v. 19), which will convince them, when it is too late, that *none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*. It was David's prudence to carry the war into their country, and fight them at the entering in of the gate of their capitale city, *Rabbah*, as some think, or *Medeba*, a city in their borders, before which they pitched to guard their coast, 1 Chron. xix. 7. Such are the terrors and desolations of war that every good prince will, in love to his people, keep it as much as may be at a distance from them.

III. Preparations made on both sides for an engagement. 1. The enemy disposed themselves into two bodies, one of Ammonites, which, being their own, were posted at the gate of the city; the other of Syrians, whom they had taken into their pay, and who were therefore posted at a distance in the field, to charge the forces of Israel in the flank or rear, while the Ammonites charged them in the front, v. 8. 2. Joab, like a wise general, was soon aware of the design, and accordingly divided his forces: the choicest men he took under his own command, to fight the Syrians, whom probably he knew to be the better soldiers, and, being hired men, better versed in the arts of war, v. 9. The rest of the forces he put under the command of Abishai his brother, to engage the Ammonites, v. 10. It should seem, Joab found the enemy so well prepared to receive them that his conduct and courage were never so tried as now.

IV. Joab's speech before the battle, v. 11. 12. It is not long, but pertinent, and brave. 1. He prudently conceals the matter with Abishai his brother, that the dividing of the forces might not be the weakening of them, but that, which part soever was borne hard upon, the other should come in to its assistance. He supposes the worst, that one of them should be obliged to give back; and in that case, upon a signal given, the other should send a detachment to relieve it. Note, Mutual helpfulness is brotherly duty. If occasion be, *thou shalt help me, and I will help thee.* Christ's soldiers should thus strengthen one another's hands in their spiritual warfare. The strong must succour and help the weak. Those that through grace are conquerors over temptation must counsel, and comfort, and pray for, those that are tempted. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren,* Luke xxii. 32. The members of the natural body help one another, 1 Cor. xii. 21. 2. He bravely encourages himself, and his brother, and the rest of the officers and soldiers, to do their utmost. Great dangers put an edge upon true courage. When Joab saw the front of the battle was against him, both before and behind, instead of giving orders to make an honourable retreat, he animated his men to charge so much more furiously: *Be of good courage and let us play the men,* not for pay and preferment, for honour and fame, but *for our people, and for the cities of our God,* for the public safety and welfare, in which the glory of God is so much interested. *God and our country* was the word. "Let us be valiant, from a principle of love to Israel, that are our people, descended from the same stock, for whom we are employed, and in whose peace we shall have peace; and from a principle of love to God, for they are his cities that we are fighting in the defence of." The relation which any person or thing stands in to God should endear it to us, and engage us to do our utmost in its service. 3. He piously leaves the issue with God: "When we have done our part, according to the duty of our place, *let the Lord do that which seemeth to him good.*" Let nothing be wanting in us, whatever the success be; let God's work be done by us, and then God's will be done concerning us. When we make conscience of doing our duty we may, with the greatest satisfaction, leave the event with God, not thinking that our valour binds him to prosper us, but that still he may do as he pleases, yet hoping for his salvation in his own way and time.

V. The victory Joab obtained over the confederate forces of Syria and Ammon, v. 13, 14. He provided for the worst, and put the case that the Syrians and Ammonites might prove too strong for him (v. 11), but he proved too strong for them both. We do not hinder our success by preparing for disappointment. The Syrians were first

routed by Joab, and then the Ammonites by Abishai; the Ammonites seem not to have fought at all, but, upon the retreat of the Syrians, to have fled into the city. It is a temptation to soldiers to fly when they have a city at their backs to fly to. It is one thing when men may either fight or fly and another thing when they must either fight or die.

15 And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together. 16 And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to Helam; and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them. 17 And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him. 18 And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. 19 And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.

Here is, 1. A new attempt of the Syrians to recover their lost honour and to check the progress of David's victorious arms. The forces that were lately dispersed rallied again, and *gathered themselves together,* v. 15. Even the baffled cause will make head as long as there is any life in it; the enemies of the Son of David do so, Matt. xxii. 34; Rev. xix. 19. These, being conscious of their insufficiency, called in the aid of their allies and dependencies on the other side of the river (v. 16), and, being thus recruited, they hoped to make their part good against Israel, but *they knew not the thoughts of the Lord, for he gathered them as sheaves into the floor;* see Mic. iv. 11—13. 2. The defeat of this attempt by the vigilance and valour of David, who, upon notice of their design, resolved not to stay till they attacked him, but went in person at the head of his army over Jordan (v. 17), and, in a pitched battle, routed the Syrians (v. 18), slew 7000 men, who belonged to 700 chariots, and 40,000 other soldiers, horse and foot, as appears by comparing 1 Chron. xix. 18. Their general was killed in the battle, and David came home in triumph, no doubt. 3. The consequence of this victory over the Syrians.

(1.) David gained several tributaries, v. 19. *The kings*, or petty princes, that had been subject to Hadarezer, when they saw how powerful David was, very wisely *made peace with Israel*, whom they found they could not make war with, *and served them*, since they were able to give them protection. Thus the promise made to Abraham (Gen. xv. 18), and repeated to Joshua (*ch. i. 4*), that the borders of Israel should extend to the river Euphrates, was performed, at length. (2.) The Ammonites lost their old allies: *The Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon*, not because they had an unrighteous cause (justifying a crime which was a breach of the law of nations), but because they found it was an unsuccessful cause. It is dangerous helping those that have God against them; for, when they fall, their helpers will fall with them.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, sent his ambassadors, his apostles and ministers, after all his servants the prophets, to the Jewish church and nation; but they treated them shamefully, as Hanun did David's ambassadors, mocked them, abused them, slew them; and it was this that filled the measure of their iniquity, and brought upon them ruin without remedy (Matt. xxi. 35, 41; xxii. 7; compare 2 Chron. xxvi. 16); for Christ takes the affronts and injuries done to his ministers as done to himself and will avenge them accordingly.

#### CHAP. XI.

What David said of the mournful report of Saul's death may more fitly be applied to the sad story of this chapter, the adultery and murder David was guilty of.—“Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon.” We wish we could draw a veil over it, and that it might never be known, might never be said, that David did such things as are here recorded of him. But it cannot, it must not, be concealed. The scripture is faithful in relating the faults even of those whom it most applauds, which is an instance of the sincerity of the penmen, and an evidence that it was not written to serve any party; and even such stories as these “were written for our learning,” that even such stories as these “he that thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall,” and that others’ harms may be our warnings. Many, no doubt, have been emboldened to sin, and hardened in it, by this story, and to them it is a “savour of death unto death;” but many have by it been awakened to a holy jealousy over themselves, and constant watchfulness against sin, and to them it is a “savour of life unto life.” Those are very great sins, and greatly aggravated, which here we find David guilty of. I. He committed adultery with Bath-sheba, the wife of Uriah, ver. 1–5. II. He endeavoured to father the spurious brood upon Uriah, ver. 6–13. III. When that project failed, he plotted the death of Uriah by the sword of the children of Ammon, and effected it, ver. 14–25. IV. He married Bath-sheba, ver. 26, 27. Is this David? Is this the man after God’s own heart? How is his behaviour changed, worse than it was before Ahimelech! How has this gold become dim! Let him that readeth understand what the best of men are when God leaves them to themselves.

**A**ND it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. 2 And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw

a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. 3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness; and she returned unto her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

Here is, I. David’s glory, in pursuing the war against the Ammonites, v. 1. We cannot take that pleasure in viewing this great action which hitherto we have taken in observing David’s achievements, because the beauty of it was stained and sullied by sin; otherwise we might take notice of David’s wisdom and bravery in following his blow. Having routed the army of the Ammonites in the field, as soon as ever the season of the year permitted he sent more forces to waste the country and further to avenge the quarrel of his ambassadors. Rabbah, their metropolis, made a stand, and held out a great while. To this city Joab laid close siege, and it was at the time of this siege that David fell into this sin.

II. David’s shame, in being himself conquered, and led captive by his own lust. The sin he was guilty of was adultery, against the letter of the seventh commandment, and (in the judgment of the patriarchal age) a heinous crime, and an iniquity to be punished by the judges (Job xxxi. 11), a sin which takes away the heart, and gets a man a wound and dishonour, more than any other, and the reproach of which is not wiped away.

1. Observe the occasions which led to this sin. (1.) Neglect of his business. When he should have been abroad with his army in the field, fighting the battles of the Lord, he devolved the care upon others, and he himself tarried still at Jerusalem, v. 1. To the war with the Syrians David went in person, *ch. x. 17*. Had he been now at his post at the head of his forces, he would have been out of the way of this temptation. When we are out of the way of our duty we are in the way of temptation. (2.) Love of ease, and the indulgence of a slothful temper: *He came off his bed at evening-tide, v. 2*. There he had dozed away the afternoon in idleness, which he should have spent in some exercise for his own improvement or the good of others. He used to pray, not only morning and evening, but at noon, in the day of his trouble: it is to be feared he had, this noon, omitted to do so. Idleness gives great advantage to the tempter. Standing waters gather filth. The bed of sloth often proves the bed of lust. (3.) A wandering eye: *He*



saw a woman washing herself, probably from some ceremonial pollution, according to the law. The sin came in at the eye, as Eve's did. Perhaps he sought to see her, at least he did not practise according to his own prayer, *Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity*, and his son's caution in a like case, *Look not thou on the wine when it is red*. Either he had not, like Job, *made a covenant with his eyes*, or, at this time, he had forgotten it.

2. The steps of the sin. When he saw her, lust immediately conceived, and, (1.) He enquired who she was (v. 3), perhaps intending only, if she were unmarried, to take her to wife, as he had taken several; but, if she were a wife, having no design upon her. (2.) The corrupt desire growing more violent, though he was told she was a wife, and whose wife she was, yet he sent messengers for her, and then, it may be, intended only to please himself with her company and conversation. But, (3.) When she came *he lay with her*, she too easily consenting, because he was a great man, and famed for his goodness too. Surely (thinks she) that can be no sin which such a man as David is the mover of. See how the way of sin is down-hill; when men begin to do evil they cannot soon stop themselves. *The beginning of lust, as of strife, is like the letting forth of water*; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with. The foolish fly fires her wings, and fools away her life at last, by playing about the candle.

3. The aggravations of the sin. (1.) He was now in years, fifty at least, some think more, when those lusts which are more properly youthful, one would think, should not have been violent in him. (2.) He had many wives and concubines of his own; this is insisted on, *ch. xii. 8*. (3.) Uriah, whom he wronged, was one of his own worthies, a person of honour and virtue, one that was now abroad in his service, hazarding his life in the high places of the field for the honour and safety of him and his kingdom, where he himself should have been. (4.) Bath-sheba, whom he debauched, was a lady of good reputation, and, till she was drawn by him and his influence into this wickedness, had no doubt preserved her purity. Little did she think that ever she could have done so bad a thing as to *forsake the guide of her youth, and forget the covenant of her God*; nor perhaps could any one in the world but David have prevailed against her. The adulterer not only wrongs and ruins his own soul, but, as much as he can, another's soul too. (5.) David was a king, whom God had entrusted with the sword of justice and the execution of the law upon other criminals, particularly upon adulterers, who were, by the law, to be put to death; for him therefore to be guilty of those crimes himself was to make himself a pattern, when he should have been a terror, to evil doers. With what face

could he rebuke or punish that in others which he was conscious to himself of being guilty of? See *Rom. ii. 22*. Much more might be said to aggravate the sin; and I can think but of one excuse for it, which is that it was done but once; it was far from being his practice; it was by the surprise of a temptation that he was drawn into it. He was not one of those of whom the prophet complains that *they were as fed horses, neighing every one after his neighbour's wife* (*Jer. v. 8*); but this once God left him to himself, as he did Hezekiah, *that he might know what was in his heart*, *2 Chron. xxxii. 31*. Had he been told of it before, he would have said, as Hazael, *What! is thy servant a dog?* But by this instance we are taught what need we have to pray every day, *Father, in heaven, lead us not into temptation*, and to watch, that we enter not into it.

6 And David sent to Joab, *saying*, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. 8 And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. 10 And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, *Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?* 11 And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? *as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.* 12 And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow. 13 And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

Uriah, we may suppose, had now been absent from his wife some weeks, making the campaign in the country of the Ammonites, and not intending to return till the end of it. The situation of his wife would *bring to light the hidden works of darkness*; and when Uriah, at his return, should find how he had been abused, and by whom, it might well be expected, 1. That he would prosecute his wife, according to law, and have her stoned to death; for *jealousy is the rage of a man*, especially a man of honour, and he that is thus injured *will not spare in the day of vengeance*, Prov. vi. 34. This Bath-sheba was apprehensive of when she sent to let David know she was with child, intimating that he was concerned to protect her, and, it is likely, if he had not promised her so to do (so wretchedly abusing his royal power), she would not have consented to him. Hope of impunity is a great encouragement to iniquity. 2. It might also be expected that since he could not prosecute David by law for an offence of this nature he would take his revenge another way, and raise a rebellion against him. There have been instances of kings who by provocations of this nature, given to some of their powerful subjects, have lost their crowns. To prevent this double mischief, David endeavours to father the child which should be born upon Uriah himself, and therefore sends for him home to stay a night or two with his wife. Observe,

I. How the plot was laid. Uriah must come home from the army under pretence of bringing David an account *how the war prospered*, and how they went on with the siege of Rabbah, r. 7. Thus does he pretend a more than ordinary concern for his army when that was the least thing in his thoughts; if he had not had another turn to serve, an express of much less figure than Uriah might have sufficed to bring him a report of the state of the war. David, having had as much conference with Uriah as he thought requisite to cover the design, sent him to his house, and, that he might be the more pleasant there with the wife of his youth, sent a dish of meat after him for their supper, r. 8. When that project failed the first night, and Uriah, being weary of his journey and more desirous of sleep than meat, lay all night in the guard-chamber, the next night *he made him drunk* (r. 13), or made him merry, tempted him to drink more than was fit, that he might forget his vow (v. 11), and might be disposed to go home to his own bed, to which perhaps, if David could have made him dead drunk, he would have ordered him to be carried. It is a very wicked thing, upon any design whatsoever, to make a person drunk. *Woe to him that does so*, Hab. ii. 15, 16. God will put a cup of trembling into the hands of those who put into the hands of others the cup of drunkenness. Robbing a man of his reason is worse than robbing him of his money, and drawing him

into sin worse than drawing him into any trouble whatsoever. Every good man, especially every magistrate, should endeavour to prevent this sin, by admonishing, restraining, and denying the glass to those whom they see falling into excess; but to further it is to do the devil's work, to officiate as factor for him.

II. How this plot was defeated by Uriah's firm resolution not to lie in his own bed. Both nights he slept with the life-guard, and *went not down to his house*, though, it is probable, his wife pressed him to do it as much as David, r. 9, 12. Now, 1. Some think he suspected what was done, being informed of his wife's attendance at court, and therefore he would not go near her. But, if he had had any suspicion of that kind, surely he would have opened the letter that David sent by him to Joab. 2. Whether he suspected any thing or no, Providence put this resolution into his heart, and kept him to it, for the discovering of David's sin, and that the baffling of his design to conceal it might awaken David's conscience to confess it and repent of it. 3. The reason he gave to David for this strange instance of self-denial and mortification was very noble, r. 11. While the army was encamped in the field, he would not lie at ease in his own house. "The ark is in a tent," whether at home, in the tent David had pitched for it, or abroad, with Joab in the camp, is not certain. "Joab, and all the mighty men of Israel, lie hard and uneasy, and much exposed to the weather and to the enemy; and shall I go and take my ease and pleasure at my own house?" No, he protests he will not do it. Now, (1.) This was in itself a generous resolution, and showed Uriah to be a man of a public spirit, bold and hardy, and mortified to the delights of sense. In times of public difficulty and danger it does not become us to repose ourselves in security, or roll ourselves in pleasure, or, with the king and Haman, to sit down to drink when the city *Shushan was perplexed*, Esth. iii. 15. We should voluntarily endure hardness when the church of God is constrained to endure it. (2.) It might have been of use to awaken David's conscience, and make his heart to smite him for what he had done. [1.] That he had basely abused so brave a man as Uriah was, a man so heartily concerned for him and his kingdom, and that acted for him and it with so much vigour. [2.] That he was himself so unlike him. The consideration of the public hardships and hazards kept Uriah from lawful pleasures, yet could not keep David, though more nearly interested, from unlawful ones. Uriah's severity to himself should have shamed David for his indulgence of himself. The law was, *When the host goeth forth against the enemy then, in a special manner, keep thyself from every wicked thing*, Deut. xxiii. 9. Uriah outdid that law but David violated it.

14 And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. 15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. 16 And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men *were*. 17 And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell *some* of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war; 19 And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, 20 And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? 21 Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 22 So the messenger went, and came and showed David all that Joab had sent him for. 23 And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. 24 And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and *some* of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 25 Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him. 26 And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27 And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and

she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

When David's project of fathering the child upon Uriah himself failed, so that, in process of time, Uriah would certainly know the wrong that had been done him, to prevent the fruits of his revenge, the devil put it into David's heart to take him off, and then neither he nor Bath-sheba would be in any danger (what prosecution could there be when there was no prosecutor?), suggesting further that, when Uriah was out of the way, Bath-sheba might, if he pleased, be his own for ever. Adulteries have often occasioned murders, and one wickedness must be covered and secured with another. The beginnings of sin are therefore to be dreaded; for who knows where they will end? It is resolved in David's breast (which one would think could never possibly have harboured so vile a thought) that Uriah must die. That innocent, valiant, gallant man, who was ready to die for his prince's honour, must die by his prince's hand. David has sinned, and Bath-sheba has sinned, and both against him, and therefore he must die; David determines he must. Is this the man whose heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt? *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*—But ah, how changed! Is this he that executed judgment and justice to all his people? How can he now do so unjust a thing? See how fleshly lusts war against the soul, and what devastations they make in that war; how they blind the eyes, harden the heart, sear the conscience, and deprive men of all sense of honour and justice. *Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding and quite loses it; he that doth it destroys his own soul*, Prov. vi. 32. But, as the eye of the adulterer, so the hand of the murderer seeks concealment, Job xxiv. 14, 15. Works of darkness hate the light. When David bravely slew Goliath it was done publicly, and he gloried in it; but, when he basely slew Uriah, it must be done clandestinely, for he is ashamed of it, and well he may. Who would do a thing that he dare not own? The devil, having, as a poisonous serpent, put it into David's heart to murder Uriah, as a subtle serpent he puts it into his head how to do it. Not as Absalom slew Amnon, by commanding his servants to assassinate him, nor as Ahab slew Naboth by suborning witnesses to accuse him, but by exposing him to the enemy, a way of doing it which, perhaps, would not seem so odious to conscience and the world, because soldiers expose themselves of course. If Uriah had not been in that dangerous post, another must; he has (as we say) a chance for his life; if he fight stoutly, he may perhaps come off; and, if he die, it is in the field of honour, where a soldier would choose to die; and yet all this will not save

it from being a wilful murder, of malice pre-  
pense.

I. Orders are sent to Joab to set Uriah in the front of the hottest battle, and then to desert him, and abandon him to the enemy, v. 14, 15. This was David's project to take off Uriah, and it succeeded, as he designed. Many were the aggravations of this murder. 1. It was deliberate. He took time to consider of it; and though he had time to consider of it, for he wrote a letter about it, and though he had time to have countermanded the order afterwards before it could be put in execution, yet he persisted in it. 2. He sent the letter by Uriah himself, than which nothing could be more base and barbarous, to make him accessory to his own death. And what a paradox was it that he could bear such a malice against him in whom yet he could repose such a confidence as that he would carry letters which he must not know the purport of. 3. Advantage must be taken of Uriah's own courage and zeal for his king and country, which deserve the greatest praise and recompence, to betray him the more easily to his fate. If he had not been forward to expose himself, perhaps he was a man of such importance that Joab could not have exposed him; and that this noble fire should be designedly turned upon himself was a most detestable instance of ingratitude. 4. Many must be involved in the guilt. Joab, the general, to whom the blood of his soldiers, especially the worthies, ought to be precious, must do it; he, and all that retire from Uriah when they ought in conscience to support and second him, become guilty of his death. 5. Uriah cannot thus die alone: the party he commands is in danger of being cut off with him; and it proved so: some of the people, even the servants of David (so they are called, to aggravate David's sin in being so prodigal of their lives), fell with him, v. 17. Nay, this wilful misconduct by which Uriah must be betrayed might be of fatal consequence to the whole army, and might oblige them to raise the siege. 6. It will be the triumph and joy of the Ammonites, the sworn enemies of God and Israel; it will gratify them exceedingly. David prayed for himself, that he might not fall into the hands of man, nor flee from his enemies (*ch.* xxiv. 13, 14); yet he sells his servant Uriah to the Ammonites, and not for any iniquity in his hand.

II. Joab executes these orders. In the next assault that is made upon the city Uriah has the most dangerous post assigned him, is encouraged to hope that if he be repulsed by the besieged he shall be relieved by Joab, in dependence on which he marches on with resolution, but, succours not coming on, the service proves too hot, and he is slain in it, v. 16, 17. It was strange that Joab would do such a thing merely upon a letter, without knowing the reason. But, 1. Perhaps

he supposed Uriah had been guilty of some great crime, to enquire into which David had sent for him, and that, because he would not punish him openly, he took this course with him to put him to death. 2. Joab had been guilty of blood, and we may suppose it pleased him very well to see David himself falling into the same guilt, and he was willing enough to serve him in it, that he might continue to be favourable to him. It is common for those who have done ill themselves to desire to be countenanced therein by others doing ill likewise, especially by the sins of those that are eminent in the profession of religion. Or, perhaps, David knew that Joab had a pique against Uriah, and would gladly be avenged on him; otherwise Joab, when he saw cause, knew how to dispute the king's orders, as *ch.* xix. 5; xxiv. 3.

III. He sends an account of it to David. An express is despatched away immediately with a report of this last disgrace and loss which they had sustained, v. 18. And, to disguise the affair, 1. He supposes that David would appear to be angry at his bad conduct, would ask why they came so near the wall (v. 20), did they not know that Abimelech lost his life by doing so? v. 21. We had the story (*Judg.* ix. 53), which book, it is likely, was published as a part of the sacred history in Samuel's time; and (be it noted to their praise, and for imitation) even the soldiers were conversant with their bibles, and could readily quote the scripture-story, and make use of it for admonition to themselves not to run upon the same attempts which they found had been fatal. 2. He slyly orders the messenger to soothe it with telling him that Uriah the Hittite was dead also, which gave too broad an intimation to the messenger, and by him to others, that David would be secretly pleased to hear that; for murder will out. And, when men do such base things, they must expect to be bantered and upbraided with them, even by their inferiors. The messenger delivered his message agreeably to orders, v. 22—24. He makes the besieged to sally out first upon the besiegers (*they came out unto us into the field*), represents the besiegers as doing their part with great bravery (*we were upon them even to the entering of the gate*—we forced them to retire into the city with precipitation), and so concludes with a slight mention of the slaughter made among them by some shot from the wall: *Some of the king's servants are dead*, and particularly *Uriah the Hittite*, an officer of note, stood first in the list of the slain.

IV. David receives the account with a secret satisfaction, v. 25. Let not Joab be displeased, for David is not. He blames not his conduct, nor thinks they did wrong in approaching so near the wall: all is well now that Uriah is put out of the way. This

point being gained, he can make light of the loss, and turn it off easily with an excuse: *The sword devours one as well as another*; it was a chance of war, nothing more common. He orders Joab to make the battle more strong next time, while he, by his sin, was weakening it, and provoking God to blast the undertaking.

V. He marries the widow in a little time. She submitted to the ceremony of mourning for her husband as short a time as custom would admit (v. 26), and then David took her to his house as his wife, and she bore him a son. Uriah's revenge was prevented by his death, but the birth of the child so soon after the marriage published the crime. Sin will have shame. Yet that was not the worst of it: *The thing that David had done displeased the Lord*. The whole matter of *Uriah* (as it is called, 1 Kings xv. 5), the adultery, falsehood, murder, and this marriage at last, it was all displeasing to the Lord. He had pleased himself, but displeased God. Note, God sees and hates sin in his own people. Nay, the nearer any are to God in profession the more displeasing to him their sins are; for in them there is more ingratitude, treachery, and reproach, than in the sins of others. Let none therefore encourage themselves in sin by the example of David; for those that sin as he did will fall under the displeasure of God as he did. Let us therefore stand in awe and sin not, not sin after the similitude of his transgression.

## CHAP. XII.

The foregoing chapter gave us the account of David's sin; this gives us the account of his repentance. Though he fell, he was not utterly cast down, but, by the grace of God, recovered himself, and found mercy with God. Here is, I. His conviction, by a message Nathan brought him from God, which was a parable that obliged him to condemn himself (ver. 1—6), and the application of the parable, in which Nathan charged him with the sin (ver. 7—9) and pronounced sentence upon him, ver. 10—12. II. His repentance and remission, with a proviso, ver. 13, 14. III. The sickness and death of the child, and his behaviour while it was sick and when it was dead (ver. 15—23), in both which David gave evidence of his repentance. IV. The birth of Solomon, and God's gracious message concerning him, in which God gave an evidence of his reconciliation to David, ver. 24, 25. V. The taking of Bathsheba (ver. 26—31), which is mentioned as a further instance that God did not deal with David according to his sins.

AND the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. 2 The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: 3 But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. 4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he

spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. 5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, *As the LORD liveth*, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: 6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. 7 And Nathan said to David, *Thou art* the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul: 8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. 9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife *to be* thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. 11 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For thou didst *it* secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. 13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. 14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee shall surely die.

It seems to have been a great while after David had been guilty of adultery with Bathsheba before he was brought to repentance

for it. For, when Nathan was sent to him, the child was born (v. 14), so that it was about nine months that David lay under the guilt of that sin, and, for aught that appears, unrepented of. What shall we think of David's state all this while? Can we imagine that his heart never smote him for it, or that he never lamented it in secret before God? I would willingly hope that he did, and that Nathan was sent to him, immediately upon the birth of the child, when the thing by that means came to be publicly known and talked of, to draw from him an open confession of the sin, to the glory of God, the admonition of others, and that he might receive, by Nathan, absolution with certain limitations. But, during these nine months, we may well suppose his comforts and the exercises of his graces suspended, and his communion with God interrupted; during all that time, it is certain, he penned no psalms, his harp was out of tune, and his soul like a tree in winter, that has life in the root only. Therefore, after Nathan had been with him, he prays, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and open thou my lips*, Ps. li. 12, 15. Let us observe,

I. The messenger God sent to him. We were told by the last words of the foregoing chapter that the thing David had done displeased the Lord, upon which, one would think, it should have followed that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on him, and the messengers of death to arrest him. No, he sent a prophet to him—Nathan, his faithful friend and confidant, to instruct and counsel him, v. 1. David did not send for Nathan (though he had never had so much occasion as he had now for his confessor), but God sent Nathan to David. Note, Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. *He went on frowardly in the way of his heart*, and, if left to himself, would have wandered endlessly, but (saith God) *I have seen his ways, and will heal him*, Isa. lvii. 17, 18. He sends after us before we seek after him, else we should certainly be lost. Nathan was the prophet by whom God had sent him notice of his kind intentions towards him (ch. vii. 4), and now, by the same hand, he sends him this message of wrath. God's word in the mouth of his ministers must be received, whether it speak terror or comfort. Nathan was obedient to the heavenly vision, and went on God's errand to David. He did not say, "David has sinned, I will not come near him." No; *count him not an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*, 2 Thess. iii. 15. He did not say, "David is a king, I dare not reprove him." No; if God sends him, he *sets his face like a flint*, Isa. i. 7.

II. The message Nathan delivered to him, in order to his conviction.

1. He fetched a compass with a parable, which seemed to David as a complaint made

to him by Nathan against one of his subjects that had wronged his poor neighbour, in order to his redressing the injury and punishing the injurious. Nathan, it is likely, used to come to him upon such errands, which made this the less suspected. It becomes those who have interest in princes, and have free access to them, to intercede for those that are wronged, that they may have justice done them. (1.) Nathan represented to David a grievous injury which a rich man had done to an honest neighbour that was not able to contend with him: *The rich man had many flocks and herds* (v. 2); the poor man had one lamb only; so unequally is the world divided; and yet infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, make the distribution, that the rich may learn charity and the poor contentment. This poor man had but one lamb, a ewe-lamb, a little ewe-lamb, having not wherewithal to buy or keep more. But it was a *cade-lamb* (as we call it); *it grew up with his children*, v. 3. He was fond of it, and it was familiar with him at all times. The rich man, having occasion for a lamb to entertain a friend with, took the poor man's lamb from him by violence and made use of that (v. 4), either out of covetousness, because he grudged to make use of his own, or rather out of luxury, because he fancied the lamb that was thus tenderly kept, and ate and drank like a child, must needs be more delicate food than any of his own and have a better relish. (2.) In this he showed him the evil of the sin he had been guilty of in defiling Bath-sheba. He had many wives and concubines, whom he kept at a distance, as rich men keep their flocks in their fields. Had he had but one, and had she been dear to him, as the ewe-lamb was to its owner, had she been dear to him as *the loving hind and the pleasant roe, her breasts would have satisfied him at all times*, and he would have looked no further, Prov. v. 19. Marriage is a remedy against fornication, but marrying many is not; for, when once the law of unity is transgressed, the indulged lust will hardly stint itself. Uriah, like the poor man, had only one wife, who was to him as his own soul, and always lay in his bosom, for he had no other, he desired no other, to lie there. The traveller or wayfaring man was, as bishop Patrick explains it from the Jewish writers, the evil imagination, disposition, or desire, which came into David's heart, which he might have satisfied with some of his own, yet nothing would serve but Uriah's darling. They observe that this evil disposition is called a traveller, for in the beginning it is only so, but, in time, it becomes a guest, and, in conclusion, is master of the house. For he that is called a traveller in the beginning of the verse is called a *man* (*ish—a husband*) in the close of it. Yet some observe that in David's breast lust was but as a wayfaring man that carries only for a night; it did not constantly dwell and rule there.

(3.) By this parable he drew from David a sentence against himself. For David supposing it to be a case in fact, and not doubting the truth of it when he had it from Nathan himself, gave judgment immediately against the offender, and confirmed it with an oath, v. 5, 6. [1.] That, for his injustice in taking away the lamb, he should restore four-fold, according to the law (Exod. xxii. 1), *four sheep for a sheep*. [2.] That for his tyranny and cruelty, and the pleasure he took in abusing a poor man, he should be put to death. If a poor man steal from a rich man, to satisfy his soul when he is hungry, he shall make restitution, though it cost him *all the substance of his house*, Prov. vi. 30, 31 (and Solomon there compares the sin of adultery with that, v. 32); but if a rich man steal for stealing sake, not for want but wantonness, merely that he may be imperious and vexatious, he deserves to die for it; for to him the making of restitution is no punishment, or next to none. If the sentence be thought too severe, it must be imputed to the present roughness of David's temper, being under guilt, and not having himself as yet received mercy.

2. He closed in with him, at length, in the application of the parable. In beginning with a parable he showed his prudence, and great need there is of prudence in giving reproofs. It is well managed if, as here, the offender can be brought, ere he is aware, to convict and condemn himself. But here, in his application, he shows his faithfulness, and deals as plainly and roundly with king David himself as if he had been a common person. In plain terms, "*Thou art the man who hast done this wrong, and a much greater, to thy neighbour; and therefore, by thy own sentence, thou deservest to die, and shalt be judged out of thy own mouth. Did he deserve to die who took his neighbour's lamb? and dost not thou who hast taken thy neighbour's wife? Though he took the lamb, he did not cause the owner thereof to lose his life, as thou hast done, and therefore much more art thou worthy to die.*" Now he speaks immediately from God, and in his name. He begins with, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, a name sacred and venerable to David, and which commanded his attention. Nathan now speaks, not as a petitioner for a poor man, but as an ambassador from the great God, with whom is no respect of persons.

(1.) God, by Nathan, reminds David of the great things he had done and designed for him, anointing him to be king, and preserving him to the kingdom (v. 7), giving him power over the house and household of his predecessor, and of others that had been his masters, Nabal for one. He had given him the house of Israel and Judah. The wealth of the kingdom was at his service and every body was willing to oblige him. Nay, he was ready to bestow any thing upon

him to make him easy: *I would have given thee such and such things, v. 8.* See how liberal God is in his gifts; we are not straitened in him. Where he has given much, yet he gives more. And God's bounty to us is a great aggravation of our discontent and desire of forbidden fruit. It is ungrateful to covet what God has prohibited, while we have liberty to pray for what God has promised, and that is enough.

(2.) He charges him with a high contempt of the divine authority, in the sins he had been guilty of: *Wherefore hast thou (presuming upon thy royal dignity and power) despised the commandment of the Lord? v. 9.* This is the spring and this is the malignity of sin, that it is making light of the divine law and the law-maker; as if the obligation of it were weak, the precepts of it trifling, and the threats not at all formidable. Though no man ever wrote more honourably of the law of God than David did, yet, in this instance, he is justly charged with a contempt of it. His adultery with Bath-sheba, which began the mischief, is not mentioned, perhaps because he was already convinced of that, but, [1.] The murder of Uriah is twice mentioned: "*Thou hast killed Uriah with the sword, though not with thy sword, yet, which is equally heinous, with thy pen, by ordering him to be set in the forefront of the battle.*" Those that contrive wickedness and command it are as truly guilty of it as those that execute it. It is repeated with an aggravation: *Thou hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon*, those uncircumcised enemies of God and Israel. [2.] The marrying of Bath-sheba is likewise twice mentioned, because he thought there was no harm in that (v. 9): *Thou hast taken his wife to be thy wife*, and again, v. 10. To marry her whom he had before defiled, and whose husband he had slain, was an affront upon the ordinance of marriage, making that not only to palliate, but in a manner to consecrate, such villainies. In all this he *despised the word of the Lord* (so it is in the Hebrew), not only his commandment in general which forbade such things, but the particular word of promise which God had, by Nathan, sent to him some time before, that he would build him a house. If he had had a due value and veneration for this sacred promise, he would not thus have polluted his house with lust and blood.

(3.) He threatens an entail of judgments upon his family for this sin (v. 10): "*The sword shall never depart from thy house, not in thy time nor afterwards, but, for the most part, thou and thy posterity shall be engaged in war.*" Or it points at the slaughters that should be among his children, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, all falling by the sword. God had promised that his mercy should not depart from him and his house (ch. vii. 15), yet here threatens that the sword should not depart. Can the mercy and the sword con-

sist with each other? Yes, those may lie under great and long afflictions who yet shall not be excluded from the grace of the covenant. The reason given is, *Because thou hast despised me.* Note, Those who despise the word and law of God despise God himself and shall be lightly esteemed. It is particularly threatened, [1.] That his children should see his grief: *I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house.* Sin brings trouble into a family, and one sin is often made the punishment of another. [2.] That his wives should be his shame, that by an unparalleled piece of villany they should be publicly debauched before all Israel, v. 11, 12. It is not said that this should be done by his own son, lest the accomplishment should have been hindered by the prediction being too plain; but it was done by Absalom, at the counsel of Ahithophel, ch. xvi. 21, 22. *He that defiled his neighbour's wife should have his own defiled,* for thus that sin used to be punished, as appears by Job's imprecation, Job xxxi. 10, *Then let my wife grind unto another,* and that threatening, Hos. iv. 14. The sin was secret, and industriously concealed, but the punishment should be open, and industriously proclaimed, to the shame of David, whose sin in the matter of Uriah, though committed many years before, would then be called to mind and commonly talked of upon that occasion. As face answers to face in a glass, so does the punishment often answer to the sin; here is *blood for blood and uncleanness for uncleanness.* And thus God would show how much he hates sin, even in his own people, and that, wherever he find it, he will not let it go unpunished.

3. David's penitent confession of his sin hereupon. He says not a word to excuse himself or extenuate his sin, but freely owns it: *I have sinned against the Lord,* v. 13. It is probable that he said more to this purpose; but this is enough to show that he was truly humbled by what Nathan said, and submitted to the conviction. He owns his guilt—*I have sinned,* and aggravates it—*It was against the Lord:* on this string he harps in the psalm he penned on this occasion. Ps. li. 1, *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.*

4. His pardon declared, upon this penitent confession, but with a proviso. When David said *I have sinned,* and Nathan perceived that he was a true penitent,

(1.) He did, in God's name, assure him that his sin was forgiven: *The Lord also has put away thy sin* out of the sight of his avenging eye; *thou shalt not die,* that is, "not die eternally, nor be for ever put away from God, as thou wouldst have been if he had not put away the sin." The obligation to punishment is hereby cancelled and vacated. *He shall not come into condemnation:* that is the nature of forgiveness. "Thy iniquity shall not be thy everlasting ruin. *The sword shall not depart from thy house,* but,

[1.] It shall not cut thee off, thou shalt come to thy grave in peace." David deserved to die as an adulterer and murderer, but God would not cut him off as he might justly have done. [2.] "Though thou shalt all thy days be *chastened of the Lord,* yet thou shalt not be condemned with the world." See how ready God is to forgive sin. To this instance, perhaps, David refers, Ps. xxxii. 5, *I said, I will confess, and thou forgarest.* Let not great sinners despair of finding mercy with God if they truly repent; for who is a God like unto him, pardoning iniquity?

(2.) Yet he pronounces a sentence of death upon the child, v. 14. Behold the sovereignty of God! The guilty parent lives, and the guiltless infant dies; but all souls are his, and he may, in what way he pleases, glorify himself in his creatures. [1.] David had, by his sin, wronged God in his honour; he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The wicked people of that generation, the infidels, idolaters, and profane, would triumph in David's fall, and speak ill of God and of his law, when they saw one guilty of such foul enormities that professed such an honour both for him and it. "These are your professors! This is he that prays and sings psalms, and is so very devout! What good can there be in such exercises, if they will not restrain men from adultery and murder?" They would say, "Was not Saul rejected for a less matter? why then must David live and reign still?" not considering that God sees not as man sees, but searches the heart. To this day there are those who reproach God, and are hardened in sin, through the example of David. Now, though it is true that none have any just reason to speak ill of God, or of his word and ways, for David's sake, and it is their sin that do so, yet he shall be reckoned with that laid the stumbling-block in their way, and gave, though not cause, yet colour, for the reproach. Note, There is this great evil in the scandalous sins of those that profess religion, and relation to God, that they furnish the enemies of God and religion with matter for reproach and blasphemy, Rom. ii. 24. [2.] God will therefore vindicate his honour by showing his displeasure against David for this sin, and letting the world see that though he loves David he hates his sin; and he chooses to do it by the *death of the child.* The landlord may distrain on any part of the premises where he pleases. Perhaps the diseases and deaths of infants were not so common in those days as they are now, which might make this, as an unusual thing, the more evident token of God's displeasure; according to the word he had often said, that he would visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.

15 And Nathan departed unto his



house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. 16 David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. 17 And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. 18 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? 19 But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. 20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. 21 Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. 22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? 23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. 24 And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. 25 And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jediah, because of the LORD.

Nathan, having delivered his message, staid not at court, but went home, probably to pray for David, to whom he had been preaching. God, in making use of him as

an instrument to bring David to repentance, and as the herald both of mercy and judgment, put an honour upon the ministry, and magnified his word above all his name. David named one of his sons by Bath-sheba *Nathan*, in honour of this prophet (1 Chron. iii. 5), and it was that son of whom Christ, the great prophet, lineally descended, Luke iii. 31. When Nathan retired, David, it is probable, retired likewise, and penned the 51st Psalm, in which (though he had been assured that his sin was pardoned) he prays earnestly for pardon, and greatly laments his sin; for then will true penitents be ashamed of what they have done when God is *pacified towards them*, Ezek. xvi. 63.

Here is, I. The child's illness: *The Lord struck it, and it was very sick*, perhaps with convulsions, or some other dreadful distemper, v. 15. The diseases and death of infants that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, especially as they are sometimes sadly circumstanced, are sensible proofs of the original sin in which they are conceived.

II. David's humiliation under this token of God's displeasure, and the intercession he made with God for the life of the child (v. 16, 17): *He fasted, and lay all night upon the earth*, and would not suffer any of his attendants either to feed him or help him up. This was an evidence of the truth of his repentance. For, 1. Hereby it appeared that he was willing to bear the shame of his sin, to have it ever before him, and to be continually upbraided with it; for this child would be a continual memorandum of it, both to himself and others, if he lived: and therefore he was so far from desiring its death, as most in such circumstances do, that he prayed earnestly for its life. True penitents patiently bear the reproach of their youth, and of their youthful lusts, Jer. xxxi. 19. 2. A very tender compassionate spirit appeared in this, and great humanity, above what is commonly found in men, especially men of war, towards little children, even their own; and this was another sign of a broken contrite spirit. Those that are penitent will be pitiful. 3. He discovered, in this, a great concern for another world, which is an evidence of repentance. Nathan had told him that certainly the child should die; yet, while it is in the reach of prayer, he earnestly intercedes with God for it, chiefly (as we may suppose) that its soul might be safe and happy in another world, and that his sin might not come against the child, and that it might not fare the worse for that in the future state. 4. He discovered, in this, a holy dread of God and of his displeasure. He deprecated the death of the child chiefly as it was a token of God's anger against him and his house, and was inflicted in performance of a threatening; therefore he prayed thus earnestly that, if it were the will of God, the child might live, because

that would be to him a token of God's being reconciled to him. *Lord, chasten me not in thy hot displeasure.* Ps. vi. 1.

III. The death of the child: It died on the seventh day (v. 18), when it was seven days old, and therefore not circumcised, which David might perhaps interpret as a further token of God's displeasure, that it died before it was brought under the seal of the covenant; yet he does not therefore doubt of its being happy, for the benefits of the covenant do not depend upon the seals. David's servants, judging of him by themselves, were afraid to tell him that *the child was dead*, concluding that then he would disquiet himself most of all; so that he knew not till he asked, v. 19.

IV. David's wonderful calmness and composure of mind when he understood the child was dead. Observe,

1. What he did. (1.) He laid aside the expressions of his sorrow, washed and anointed himself, and called for clean linen, that he might decently appear before God in his house. (2.) *He went up to the tabernacle and worshipped*, like Job when he heard of the death of his children. He went to acknowledge the hand of God in the affliction, and to humble himself under it, and to submit to his holy will in it, to thank God that he himself was spared and his sin pardoned, and to pray that God would not proceed in his controversy with him, nor stir up all his wrath. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray.* Weeping must never hinder worshipping. (3.) *Then he went to his own house and refreshed himself*, as one who found benefit by his religion in the day of his affliction; for, having worshipped, *he did eat*, and his countenance was no more sad.

2. The reason he gave for what he did. His servants thought it strange that he should afflict himself so for the sickness of the child and yet take the death of it so easily, and asked him the reason of it (v. 21), in answer to which he gives this plain account of his conduct, (1.) That while the child was alive he thought it his duty to importune the divine favour towards it, v. 22. Nathan had indeed said the child should die, but, for aught that he knew, the threatening might be conditional, as that concerning Hezekiah: upon his great humiliation and earnest prayer, he that had so often *heard the voice of his weeping* might be pleased to reverse the sentence, and spare the child: *Who can tell whether God will yet be gracious to me?* God gives us leave to be earnest with him in prayer for particular blessings, from a confidence in his power and general mercy, though we have no particular promise to build upon: we cannot be sure, yet let us pray, *for who can tell but God will be gracious to us*, in this or that particular? When our relations and friends have fallen sick, the prayer of faith has prevailed much; while there is life there is hope, and, while

there is hope, there is room for prayer. (2.) That now the child was dead he thought it as much his duty to be satisfied in the divine disposal concerning it (v. 23): *Now, wherefore should I fast?* Two things checked his grief:—[1.] *I cannot bring him back again*; and again, *He shall not return to me*. Those that are dead are out of the reach of prayer; nor can our tears profit them. We can neither weep nor pray them back to this life. Wherefore then should we fast? *To what purpose is this waste?* Yet David fasted and wept for Jonathan when he was dead, in honour to him. [2.] *I shall go to him*. First, To him to the grave. Note, The consideration of our own death should moderate our sorrow at the death of our relations. It is the common lot; instead of mourning for their death, we should think of our own: and, whatever loss we have of them now, we shall die shortly, and go to them. Secondly, To him to heaven, to a state of blessedness, which even the Old-Testament saints had some expectation of. Godly parents have great reason to hope concerning their children that die in infancy that it is well with their souls in the other world; for *the promise is to us and to our seed*, which shall be performed to those that do not put a bar in their own door, as infants do not. *Favores sunt ampliandi*—*Favours received should produce the hope of more*. God calls those his children that are born unto him; and, if they be his, he will save them. This may comfort us when our children are removed from us by death, they are better provided for, both in work and wealth, than they could have been in this world. We shall be with them shortly, to part no more.

V. The birth of Solomon. Though David's marrying Bath-sheba had displeased the Lord, yet he was not therefore commanded to divorce her; so far from this that God gave him that son by her on whom the covenant of royalty should be entailed. Bath-sheba, no doubt, was greatly afflicted with the sense of her sin and the tokens of God's displeasure. But, God having restored to David the joys of his salvation, he comforted her with the same comforts with which he himself was comforted of God (v. 24): *He comforted Bath-sheba*. And both he and she had reason to be comforted in the tokens of God's reconciliation to them, 1. Inasmuch as, by his providence, he gave them a son, not as the former, who was given in anger and taken away in wrath, but a child graciously given, and written among the living in Jerusalem. They called him *Solomon*—*peaceful*, because his birth was a token of God's being at peace with them, because of the prosperity which was entailed upon him, and because he was to be a type of Christ, the prince of peace. God had removed one son from them, but now gave them another instead of him, like *Seth instead of Abel*, Gen. iv. 25. Thus God often balances the griefs of his people with

comforts in the same thing wherein he hath afflicted them, setting the one over-against the other. David had very patiently submitted to the will of God in the death of the other child, and now God made up the loss of that, abundantly to his advantage, in the birth of this. The way to have our creature-comforts either continued or restored, or the loss of them made up some other way, is cheerfully to resign them to God. 2. Inasmuch as, by his grace, he particularly owned and favoured that son: *The Lord loved him* (v. 24 and 25), ordered him, by the prophet Nathan, to be called *Jedidiah—Beloved of the Lord*: though a seed of evil-doers (for such David and Bath-sheba were), yet so well ordered was the covenant, and the crown entailed by it, that it took away all attainders and corruption of blood, signifying that those who were by nature children of wrath and disobedience should, by the covenant of grace, not only be reconciled, but made favourites. And, in this name, he typified Jesus Christ, that blessed Jedidiah, the son of God's love, concerning whom God declared again and again, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

26 And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city. 27 And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters. 28 Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name. 29 And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. 30 And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance. 31 And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

We have here an account of the conquest of Rabbah, and other cities of the Ammonites. Though this comes in here after the birth of David's child, yet it is most probable that it was effected a good while before, and soon after the death of Uriah,

perhaps during the days of Bath-sheba's mourning for him. Observe, 1. That God was very gracious in giving David this great success against his enemies, notwithstanding the sin he had been guilty of just at that time when he was engaged in this war, and the wicked use he had made of the sword of the children of Ammon in the murder of Uriah. Justly might he have made that sword, thenceforward, a plague to David and his kingdom; yet he breaks it, and makes David's sword victorious, even before he repents, that this *goodness of God might lead him to repentance.* Good reason had David to own that *God dealt not with him according to his sins,* Ps. ciii. 10. 2. That Joab acted very honestly and honourably; for when he had taken the *city of waters,* the royal city, where the palace was, and from which the rest of the city was supplied with water (and therefore, upon the cutting off of that, would be obliged speedily to surrender), he sent to David to come in person to complete this great action, that he might have the praise of it, v. 26—28. Herein he showed himself a faithful servant, that sought his master's honour, and his own only in subordination to his, and left an example to the servants of the Lord Jesus, in every thing they do, to consult his honour. *Not unto us, but to thy name, give glory.* 3. That David was both too haughty and too severe upon this occasion, and neither so humble nor so tender as he should have been. (1.) He seems to have been too fond of the crown of the king of Ammon, v. 30. Because it was of extraordinary value, by reason of the precious stones with which it was set, David would have it set upon his head, though it would have been better to have cast it at God's feet, and at this time to have put his own mouth in the dust, under guilt. The heart that is truly humbled for sin is dead to worldly glory and looks upon it with a holy contempt. (2.) He seems to have been too harsh with his prisoners of war, v. 31. Taking the city by storm, after it had obstinately held out against a long and expensive siege, if he had put all whom he found in arms to the sword in the heat of battle, it would have been severe enough; but to kill them afterwards in cold blood, and by cruel tortures, with saws and harrows, tearing them to pieces, did not become him who, when he entered upon the government, promised to sing of mercy as well as judgment, Ps. ci. 1. Had he made examples of those only who had abused his ambassadors, or advised or assisted in it, that being a violation of the law of nations, it might have been looked upon as a piece of necessary justice for terror to other nations; but to be thus severe with all the cities of the children of Ammon (that is, the garrisons or soldiers of the cities) was extremely rigorous, and a sign that David's heart was not yet made soft by repentance, else the bowels of his

compassion would not have been thus shut up—a sign that he had not yet found mercy, else he would have been more ready to show mercy.

## CHAP. XIII.

The righteous God had lately told David, by Nathan the prophet, that, to chastise him for his sin in the matter of Uriah, he would "raise up evil against him out of his own house," ch. xii. 11. And here, in the very next chapter, we find the evil beginning to rise; henceforward he was followed with one trouble after another, which made the latter part of his reign less glorious and pleasant than the former part. Thus God chastened him with the rod of men, yet assured him that his "loving-kindness he would not utterly take away." Adultery and murder were David's sins, and those sins among his children (Amnon defiling his sister Tamar, and Absalom murdering his brother Amnon) were the beginnings of his punishment, and the more grievous because he had reason to fear that his bad example might help to bring them to these wickednesses. In this chapter we have, I. Amnon ravishing Tamar, assisted in his plot to do it by Jonadab his kinsman, and villainously executing it, ver. 1—20. II. Absalom murdering Amnon for it, ver. 21—39. Both were great griefs to David, and the more because he was unwittingly made accessory to both, by sending Tamar to Amnon and Amnon to Absalom.

AND it came to pass after this that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. 2 And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she *was* a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab *was* a very subtle man. 4 And he said unto him, Why *art* thou, *being* the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar; my brother Absalom's sister. 5 And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand. 6 So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand. 7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat. 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes. 9 And she took a pan, and poured *them* out before

him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me. And they went out every man from him. 10 And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought *them* into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 And when she had brought *them* unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. 12 And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly. 13 And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. 14 Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her. 15 Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her *was* greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone: 16 And she said unto him, *There is* no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her. 17 Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this *woman* out from me, and bolt the door after her. 18 And *she had* a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that *were* virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. 19 And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that *was* on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying. 20 And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

We have here a particular account of the abominable wickedness of Amnon in ravishing his sister, a subject not fit to be enlarged upon nor indeed to be mentioned without blushing, that ever any man should be so vile, especially that a son of David should be so. Amnon's character, we have reason to think, was bad in other things; if he had not forsaken God, he would never have been given up to these vile affections. Godly parents have often been afflicted with wicked children; grace does not run in the blood, but corruption does. We do not find that David's children imitated him in his devotion; but his false steps they trod in, and in those did much worse, and repented not. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be if in any instance they give their children bad examples. Observe the steps of Amnon's sin.

I. The devil, as an unclean spirit, put it into his heart to lust after his sister Tamar. Beauty is a snare to many; it was so to her. She was fair, and therefore Amnon coveted her, *v. 1*. Those that are peculiarly handsome have no reason, on that account, to be proud, but great reason to stand upon their watch. Amnon's lust was, 1. Unnatural in itself, to lust after his sister, which even natural conscience startles at and cannot think of without horror. Such a spirit of contradiction there is in man's corrupt nature that still it desires forbidden fruit, and the more strongly it is forbidden the more greedily it is desired. Can he entertain the thought of betraying that virtue and honour of which, as a brother, he ought to have been the protector? But what wickedness so vile as not to find admittance into an unsanctified unguarded heart, left to itself? 2. It was very uneasy to him. He was so vexed that he could not gain an opportunity to solicit her chastity (for innocent converse with her was not denied him) that he *fell sick*, *v. 2*. Fleshly lusts are their own punishment, and not only *war against the soul*, but against the body too, and are the *rottenness of the bones*. See what a hard master sinners serve, and how heavy his yoke is.

II. The devil, as a subtle serpent, put it into his head how to compass this wicked design. Amnon had a friend (so he called him, but he was really an enemy to him), a kinsman, that had in him more of David's blood (for he was his nephew) than of David's spirit, for he was a subtle man, cunning to carry on any bad design, especially an intrigue of this nature, *v. 3*.

1. He took notice that Amnon looked ill, and, being a subtle man, concluded that he was love-sick (*v. 4*), and asks him, "*Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?*" Why dost thou pine, being the king's eldest son, and heir to the crown. *Being the king's son,*" (1.) "Thou hast the pleasures of the court to divert thee; take those pleasures then, and with them drive

away the sorrow, whatever it is." Content and comfort are not always to be found in royal palaces. With much more reason may we ask dejected and disconsolate saints why they, who are the children of the King of kings and heirs of the crown of life, are thus *lean from day to day*. (2.) "Thou hast the power of a prince to command what thou wantest and wishest for; use that power therefore, and gratify thyself. Pine not away for that which, lawful or unlawful, thou, being the king's son, mayest have. *Quicquid libet licet—Your will is law.*" Thus Jezebel to Ahab in a like case (1 Kings xxi. 7), *Dost not thou govern Israel?* The abuse of power is the most dangerous temptation of the great.

2. Amnon having the impudence to own his wicked lust, miscalling it *love* (*I love Tamar*), Jonadab put him in a way to compass his design, *v. 5*. Had he been what he pretended (Amnon's friend), he would have startled at the mention of such horrid wickedness, would have laid before him the evil of it, what an offence it was to God and what a wrong to his own soul to entertain such a vile thought, of what fatal consequence it would be to him to cherish and prosecute it; he would have used his subtlety to divert Amnon from it, by recommending some other person to him, whom he might lawfully marry. But he seems not at all surprised at it, objects not either the unlawfulness or the difficulty, the reproach or so much as his father's displeasure, but puts him in the way to get Tamar to his bed-side, and then he might do as he pleased. Note, The case of those is very miserable whose friends, instead of admonishing and reproving them, flatter them in and forward them in their sinful ways, and are their counsellors and contrivers to do wickedly. Amnon is already sick, but goes about; he must take upon him to be so ill (and his thin looks will give colour enough to the pretence) as not to be able to get up, and to have no appetite to any thing but just that which pleases his fancy. Dainty meat is abhorred, Job xxxiii. 20. The best dish from the king's table cannot please him; but, if he can eat any thing, it must be from his sister Tamar's fair hand. This is what he is advised to.

3. Amnon followed these directions, and thus got Tamar within his reach: *He made himself sick*, *v. 6*. Thus he *lieth in wait secretly, as a lion in his den, to catch the poor*, and to *draw them into his net*, Ps. x. 8—10. David was always fond of his children, and concerned if any thing ailed them: he no sooner hears that Amnon is sick than he comes himself to visit him. Let parents learn hence to be tender of their children and compassionate towards them. The sick child commonly *the mother comforteth* (Isa. lvi. 13), but let not the *father* be unconcerned. We may suppose that when David came to see his sick son he gave him good

counsel to make a right use of his affliction, and prayed with him, which yet did not alter his wicked purpose. At parting, the indulgent father asks, "Is there any thing thou hast a mind to, that I can procure for thee?" "Yes, Sir," says the dissembling son, "my stomach is weak, and I know not of any thing I can eat, unless it be a cake of my sister Tamar's making, and I cannot be satisfied that it is so unless I see her make it, and it will do me the more good if I eat it at her hand." David saw no reason to suspect any mischief intended. God hid his heart from understanding in this matter. He therefore immediately orders Tamar to go and attend her sick brother, *v. 7*. He does it very innocently, but afterwards, no doubt, reflected upon it with great regret. Tamar as innocently goes to her brother's chamber, neither dreading any abuse (why should she from a brother, a sick brother?) nor disdaining, in obedience to her father and love to her brother (though but her half-brother), to be his nurse, *v. 8, 9*. Though she was a king's daughter, a great beauty (*v. 1*), and well dressed (*v. 18*), yet she did not think it below her to knead cakes and bake them, nor would she have done this now if she had not been used to it. Good house-wifery is not a thing below the greatest ladies, nor ought they to think it a disparagement to them. The virtuous woman, whose husband sits among the elders, yet works willingly with her hands, *Prov. xxxi. 13*. Modern ages have not been destitute of such instances, nor is it so unfashionable as some would make it. Preparing for the sick should be more the care and delight of the ladies than preparing for the nice, charity more than curiosity.

4. Having got her to him, he contrives to have her alone; for *the adulterer* (much more so vile an adulterer as this) is in care that *no eye see him*, *Job xxiv. 15*. The meat is ready, but he cannot eat while he is looked at by those about him; they must all be turned out, *v. 9*. The sick must be humoured, and think they have a privilege to command. Tamar is willing to humour him; her chaste and virtuous soul has not the least thought of that which his polluted breast is full of; and therefore she makes no scruple of being alone with him *in the inner chamber, v. 10*. And now the mask is thrown off, the meat is thrown by, and the wicked wretch calls her *sister*, and yet impudently courts her to *come and lie with him, v. 11*. It was a base affront to her virtue to think it possible to persuade her to consent to such wickedness when he knew her behaviour to be always exemplarily modest and virtuous. But it is common for those that live in uncleanness to think others such as themselves, at least tender to their sparks.

III. The devil, as a strong tempter, deafens his ear to all the reasonings with which she resisted his assaults and would have per-

sued him to desist. We may well imagine what a surprise and terror it was to the young lady to be thus attacked, how she blushed and how she trembled; yet, in this great confusion, nothing could be said more pertinently, nor with greater strength of argument, than what she said to him. 1. She calls him *brother*, reminding him of the nearness of the relation, which made it unlawful for him to marry her, much more to debauch her. It was expressly forbidden (*Lev. xviii. 9*) under a severe penalty, *Lev. xx. 17*. Great care must be taken lest the love that should be among relations degenerate into lust. 2. She entreats him not to force her, which intimates that she would never consent to it in any degree; and what satisfaction could he take in offering violence? 3. She lays before him the great wickedness of it. It is *folly*; all sin is so, especially uncleanness. It is wickedness of the worst kind. Such abominations ought not to be committed in Israel, among the professing people of God, that have better statutes than the heathen have. We are Israelites; if we do such things, we are more inexcusable than others, and our condemnation will be more intolerable, for we *reproach the Lord*, and *that worthy name by which we are called*.

4. She represents to him the shame of it, which perhaps might influence him more than the sin of it: "For my part, *whither shall I couse my shame to go?* If it should be concealed, yet I shall blush to think of it as long as I live; and, if ever it be known, how shall I be able to look any of my friends in the face? For thy part, *thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel,*" that is, "Thou wilt be looked upon as an atrocious debauchee, the worst of men; thou wilt lose thy interest in the esteem of all that are wise and good, and so will be set aside as unfit to rule, though the first-born; for Israel will never submit to the government of such a fool." Prospect of shame, especially everlasting shame, should deter us from sin. 5. To divert him from his wicked purpose at this time, and (if possible) to get clear of him, she intimates to him that probably the king, rather than he should die for love of her, would dispense with the divine law and let him marry her: not as if she thought he had such a dispensing power, or would pretend to it; but she was confident that, upon notice given to the king by himself of this wicked desire, which he would scarcely have believed from any one else, he would take an effectual course to protect her from him. But all her arts and all her arguments availed not. His proud spirit cannot bear a denial; but her comfort, and honour, and all that was dear to her, must be sacrificed to his brutish and outrageous lust, *v. 14*. It is to be feared that Amnon, though young, had long lived a lewd life, which his father either knew not or punished not; for a man could not, of a sudden, arrive at such a pitch of wickedness as

this. But is this his love to Tamar? Is this the recompence he gives her for her readiness to attend him in his sickness? Will he deal with his sister as with a harlot? Base villain! God deliver all that are modest and virtuous from such wicked and unreasonable men.

IV. The devil, as a tormentor and betrayer, immediately turns his love of her into hatred (*v. 15*): *He hated her with great hatred, greatly*, so it is in the margin, and grew as outrageous in his malice as he had been in his lust.

1. He basely turned her out of doors by force; nay, as if he now disdained to touch her with his own hands, he ordered his servant to *pull her out and bolt the door after her, v. 17*. Now, (1.) The innocent injured lady had reason to resent this as a great affront, and in some respects (as she says, *v. 16*) worse than the former; for nothing could have been done more barbarous and ill-natured, or more disgraceful to her. Had he taken care to conceal what was done, her honour would have been lost to herself only. Had he gone down on his knees and begged her pardon, it might have been some little reparation. Had he given her time to compose herself after the horrid confusion she was put into, she might have kept her countenance when she went out, and so have kept her counsel. But to dismiss her thus hurried, thus rudely, as if she had done some wicked thing, obliged her, in her own defence, to proclaim the wrong that had been done her. (2.) We may learn from it both the malignity of sin (unbridled passions are as bad as unbridled appetites) and the mischievous consequences of sin (at last, it bites like a serpent); for here we find, [1.] That sins, sweet in the commission, afterwards become odious and painful, and the sinner's own conscience makes them so to himself. Amnon hated Tamar because she would not consent to his wickedness, and so take part of the blame upon herself, but to the last resisted it, and reasoned against it, and so threw all the blame upon him. Had he hated the sin, and loathed himself for it, we might have hoped he was penitent. *Godly sorrow worketh indignation*, 2 Cor. vii. 11. But to hate the person he had abused showed that his conscience was terrified, but his heart not at all humbled. See what deceitful pleasures those of the flesh are, how soon they pass away, and turn into loathing; see Ezek. xxiii. 17. [2.] That sins, secret in the commission, afterwards become open and public, and the sinners themselves often make them so. Their own tongues fall upon them. The Jewish doctors say that, upon the occasion of this wickedness of Amnon, a law was made that a young man and a young woman should never be alone together; for, said they, if the king's daughter be so used, what will become of the children of private men?

2. We must now leave the criminal to the

terrors of his own guilty conscience, and enquire what becomes of the poor victim. (1.) She bitterly lamented the injury she had received, as it was a stain to her honour, though no real blemish to her virtue. She tore her fine clothes in token of her grief, and put ashes upon her head, to deform herself, loathing her own beauty and ornaments, because they had occasioned Amnon's unlawful love; and she went on crying for another's sin, *v. 19*. (2.) She retired to her brother Absalom's house, because he was her own brother, and there she lived in solitude and sorrow, in token of her modesty and detestation of uncleanness. Absalom spoke kindly to her, bade her pass by the injury for the present, designing himself to revenge it, *v. 20*. It should seem by Absalom's question (*Has Amnon been with thee?*) that Amnon was notorious for such lewd practices, so that it was dangerous for a modest woman to be with him; this Absalom might know, and yet Tamar be wholly ignorant of it.

21 But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth. 22 And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar. 23 And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheep-shearers in Baal-hazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons. 24 And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheep-shearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant. 25 And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him. 26 Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee? 27 But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. 28 Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 29 And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the

king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.

What Solomon says of the beginning of strife is as true of the beginning of all sin, it is as the letting forth of water; when once the flood-gates are plucked up, an inundation follows; one mischief begets another, and it is hard to say what shall be in the end thereof.

I. We are here told how David resented the tidings of Amnon's sin: *He was very wrath, v. 21.* So he had reason to be, that his own son should do such a wicked thing and draw him to be accessory to it. It would be a reproach to him for not giving him a better education; it would be a blot upon his family, the ruin of his daughter, a bad example to his kingdom, and a wrong to his son's soul. But was it enough for him to be angry? He ought to have punished his son for it, and have put him to open shame; both as a father and as a king he had power to do it. But the LXX. here adds these words: *But he saddened not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was his first-born.* He fell into Eli's error, whose sons made themselves vile, and he frowned not on them. If Amnon was dear to him, his punishing him would have been so much the greater punishment to himself for his own uncleanness. But he cannot bear the shame those must submit to who correct that in others which they are conscious of in themselves, and therefore his anger must serve instead of his justice; and this hardens sinners, Eccl. viii. 11.

II. How Absalom resented it. He resolves already to do the part of a judge in Israel; and, since his father will not punish Amnon, he will, from a principle, not of justice or zeal for virtue, but of revenge, because he reckons himself affronted in the abuse done to his sister. Their mother was daughter to a heathen prince (*ch. iii. 3*), which perhaps they were upbraided with sometimes by their brethren, as children of a stranger. As such a one Absalom thought his sister was now treated; and, if Amnon thought her fit to be made his harlot, he would think him fit to be made his slave. This enraged him, and nothing less than the blood of Amnon will quench his rage. Here we have,

1. The design conceived: *Absalom hated Amnon (v. 22), and he that hateth his brother is a murderer* already, and, like Cain, *is of that wicked one, 1 John iii. 12, 15.* Absalom's hatred of his brother's crime would have been commendable, and he might justly have prosecuted him for it by a due course of law, for example to others, and the making of some compensation to his injured sister; but to hate his person, and design his death by assassination, was to put a great affront upon God, by offering to repair the breach of his seventh commandment by the violation of his sixth, as if they were not all

alike sacred. *But he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill, James ii. 11.*

2. The design concealed. He said nothing to Amnon of this matter, either good or bad, appeared as if he did not know it, and maintained towards him his usual civility, only waiting for a fair opportunity to do him a mischief. That malice is the worst, (1.) Which is hidden closely, and has no vent given to it. If Absalom had reasoned the matter with Amnon, he might have convinced him of his sin and brought him to repentance; but, saying nothing, Amnon's heart was hardened, and his own more and more embittered against him; therefore rebuking our neighbour is opposed to hating him in our hearts, Lev. xix. 17. Let passion have vent and it will spend itself. (2.) Which is gilded over with a show of friendship; so Absalom's was, *his words smoother than butter but war in his heart.* See Prov. xxvi. 26. (3.) Which is harboured long. Two full years Absalom nursed this root of bitterness, v. 24. It may be, at first, he did not intend to kill his brother (for, if he had, he might have had as fair an opportunity to do it as he had at last), and only waited for an occasion to disgrace him or do him some other mischief; but in time his hatred ripened to this, that he would be no less than the death of him. *If the sun going down once upon the wrath gives such place to the devil* (as is intimated, Eph. iv. 26, 27), what would the sunsets of two full years do?

3. The design laid. (1.) Absalom has a feast at his house in the country, as Nabal had, on occasion of his sheep-shearing, v. 23. Attentive as Absalom was to his person (*ch. xiv. 26*), and as high as he looked, he *knew the state of his flocks and looked well to his herds.* Those who have no other care about their estates in the country than how to spend them in the town take a ready way to see the end of them. When Absalom had sheep-shearers he would himself be with them. (2.) To this feast he invites the king his father, and all the princes of the blood (v. 24), not only that he might have this opportunity to pay his respects to them, but that he might make himself the more respected among his neighbours. Those that are akin to great folks are apt to value themselves too much on their kindred. (3.) The king would not go himself, because he would not put him to the expense of his entertainment, v. 25. It seems Absalom had an estate in his own hands, on which he lived like himself; the king had given it to him, but would have him to be a good husband of it: in both these he is an example to parents, when their children have grown up, to give them a competency to live upon, according to their rank, and then to take care that they do not live above it, especially that they be no way accessory to their doing so. It is prudent for the young house-keepers to begin as they can



hold out, and not to spend the wool upon the shearing of it. (4.) Absalom got leave for Amnon, and all the rest of the king's sons, to come and grace his table in the country, v. 26, 27. Absalom had so effectually concealed his enmity to Amnon that David saw no reason to suspect any design upon him in that particular invitation: "Let my brother Amnon go;" but this would make the stroke more cutting to David that he was himself drawn in to consent to that which gave the opportunity for it, as before, v. 7. It seems, David's sons, though grown up, continued to pay such a deference to their father as not to go such a small journey as this without his leave. Thus ought children, even when they have become men and women, to honour their parents, consult them, and do nothing material without their consent, much less against their mind.

4. The design executed, v. 28, 29. (1.) Absalom's entertainment was very plentiful; for he resolves that they shall all be merry with wine, at least concludes that Amnon will be so, for he knew that he was apt to drink to excess. But, (2.) The orders he gave to his servants concerning Amnon, that they should mingle his blood with his wine, were very barbarous. Had he challenged him, and, in reliance upon the goodness of his cause and the justice of God, fought him himself, though that would have been bad enough, yet it would have been more honourable and excusable (our ancient law, in some cases, allowed trial by battle); but to murder him, as he did, was to copy Cain's example, only that the reason made a difference: Abel was slain for his righteousness, Amnon for his wickedness. Observe the aggravations of this sin:—[1.] He would have Amnon slain *when his heart was merry with wine*, and he was consequently least apprehensive of danger, least able to resist it, and also least fit to go out of the world; as if his malice aimed to destroy both soul and body, not giving him time to say, *Lord, have mercy upon me*. What a dreadful surprise hath death been to many, whose hearts have been *overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness!* [2.] His servants must be employed to do it, and so involved in the guilt. He was to give the word of command—*Smite Amnon*; and then they, in obedience to him, and, upon presumption that his authority would bear them out, must *kill him*. What an impious defiance does he bid to the divine law, when, though the command of God is express, *Thou shalt not kill*, he bids them kill Amnon, with this warrant, "*Have not I commanded you?*" That is enough. *Be courageous*, and fear neither God nor man." Those servants are ill taught who obey their masters in contradiction to God, and those are wicked masters who have taught them to do so. Those are too obsequious that will damn their souls to please their masters, whose big words cannot secure them from God's wrath.

Masters must always command their servants as those that know they also have a Master in heaven. [3.] He did it in the presence of *all the king's sons*, of whom it is said (ch. viii. 18) that they were *chief rulers*; so that it was an affront to public justice which they had the administration of, and to the king his father whom they represented, and a contempt of that sword which should have been a terror to his evil deeds, while his evil deeds, on the contrary, were a terror to those that bore it. [4.] There is reason to suspect that Absalom did this, not only to revenge his sister's quarrel, but to make way for himself to the throne, which he was ambitious of, and which he would stand fair for if Amnon the eldest son was taken off. When the word of command was given Absalom's servants failed not to execute it, being buoyed up with an opinion that their master, being now next heir to the crown (for Chileab was dead, as bishop Patrick thinks), would save them from harm. Now the threatened sword is drawn in David's house which should not depart from it. *First*, His eldest son falls by it, himself being, by his wickedness, the cause of it, and his father, by his connivance, accessory to it. *Secondly*, All his sons flee from it, and come home in terror, not knowing how far their brother Absalom's bloody design might extend. See what mischief sin makes in families.

30 And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. 31 Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent. 32 And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose *that* they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead. 34 But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him. 35 And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come: as thy servant said, so it is. 36 And it came to pass, as soon as

he had made an end of speaking, that, behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore. 37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmi, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. 38 So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. 39 And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.

Here is, I. The fright that David was put into by a false report brought to Jerusalem that Absalom had slain all the king's sons, v. 30. It is common for fame to make bad worse; and the first news of such a thing as this represents it as more dreadful than afterwards it proves. Let us not therefore be afraid of evil tidings, while they want confirmation, but, when we hear the worst, hope the best, at least hope better. However, this false news gave as much affliction to David, for the present, as if it had been true; he tore his garments, and lay on the earth, while as yet it was only a flying story, v. 31. It was well that David had grace; he had need enough of it, for he had strong passions.

II. The rectifying of the mistake in two ways:—1. By the sly suggestions of Jonadab, David's nephew, who could tell him, Amnon only is dead, and not all the king's sons (v. 32, 33), and could tell him too that it was done by the appointment of Absalom, and designed from the day Amnon forced his sister Tamar. What a wicked man was he, if he knew all this or had any cause to suspect it, that he did not make David acquainted with it sooner, that means might be used to make up the quarrel, or at least that David might not throw Amnon into the mouth of danger by letting him go to Absalom's house. If we do not our utmost to prevent mischief, we make ourselves accessory to it. *If we say, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider whether we did or no?* See Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. It is well if Jonadab was not as guilty of Amnon's death as he was of his sin; such friends do those prove who are hearkened to as counsellors to do wickedly: he that would not be so kind as to prevent Amnon's sin would not be so kind as to prevent his ruin, when, it should seem, he might have done both. 2. By the safe return of all the king's sons except Amnon. They and their attendants were speedily discovered by the watch (v. 34, 35), and soon arrived, to show themselves alive, but to bring the certain sad news that Absalom had murdered their brother Amnon. The grief David had been in for that which was not made him the

better able to bear that which was, by giving him a sensible occasion, when he was undeceived, to thank God that all his sons were not dead: yet that Amnon was dead, and slain by his own brother in such a treacherous barbarous manner, was enough to put the king and court, the king and kingdom, into real mourning. Sorrow is never more reasonable than when there is sin in the case.

III. Absalom's flight from justice: Absalom immediately fled, v. 34. He was now as much afraid of the king's sons as they were of him; they fled from his malice, he from their justice. No part of the land of Israel could shelter him. The cities of refuge gave no protection to a wilful murderer. Though David had let Amnon's incest go unpunished, Absalom could not promise himself his pardon for this murder; so express was the law in this case, and so well known David's justice, and his dread of blood-guiltiness. He therefore made the best of his way to his mother's relations, and was entertained by his grandfather Talmi, king of Geshur (v. 37), and there he was protected three years (v. 38). David not demanding him, and Talmi not thinking himself obliged to send him back unless he were demanded.

IV. David's uneasiness for his absence. He mourned for Amnon a good while (v. 37); but, he being past recal, time wore off that grief: he was comforted concerning Amnon. It also wore off too much his detestation of Absalom's sin; instead of loathing him as a murderer, he longs to go forth to him, v. 39. At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him; now he can almost find in his heart to take him into his favour again. This was David's infirmity. Something God saw in his heart that made a difference, else we should have thought that he, as much as Eli, honoured his sons more than God.

#### CHAP. XIV.

How Absalom threw himself out of his royal father's protection and favour we read in the foregoing chapter, which left him an exile, outlawed, and proscribed; in this chapter we have the arts that were used to bring him and his father together again, and how, at last, it was done, which is here recorded to show the folly of David in sparing him and indulging him in his wickedness, for which he was soon after severely corrected by his unnatural rebellion. I. Joab, by bringing a feigned issue (as the lawyers speak) to be tried before him, in the case of a poor widow of Tekoah, gains from him a judgment in general, that the case might be so as that the putting of a murderer to death ought to be dispensed with, ver. 1—20. II. Upon the application of this, he gains from him an order to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, while yet he was forbidden the court, ver. 21—24. III. After an account of Absalom, his person, and family, we are told how at length he was introduced by Joab into the king's presence, and the king was thoroughly reconciled to him, ver. 25—33.

**N**OW Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom. 2 And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time

mourned for the dead: 3 And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth. 4 And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king. 5 And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I *am* indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. 6 And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and *there was* none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. 7 And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband *neither* name nor remainder upon the earth. 8 And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. 9 And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity *be* on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne *be* guiltless. 10 And the king said, Whosoever saith *ought* unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. 11 Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, *As* the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. 12 Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak *one* word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. 13 And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished. 14 For we must needs die, and *are* as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect

*any* person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him. 15 Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, *it is* because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid. 16 For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man *that would* destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God. 17 Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so *is* my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD thy God will be with thee. 18 Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak. 19 And the king said, *Is not* the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, *As* thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from aught that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: 20 To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord *is* wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all *things* that *are* in the earth.

Here is, I. Joab's design to get Absalom recalled out of banishment, his crime pardoned, and his attainder reversed, v. 1. Joab made himself very busy in this affair. 1. As a courtier that was studious, by all ways possible, to ingratiate himself with his prince and improve his interest in his favour: He *perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom*, and that, the heat of his displeasure being over, he still retained his old affection for him, and only wanted a friend to court him to be reconciled, and to contrive for him how he might do it without impeaching the honour of his justice. Joab, finding how David stood affected, undertook this good office. 2. As a friend to Absalom, for whom perhaps he had a particular kindness, whom at least he looked upon as the rising sun, to whom it was his interest to recommend himself. He plainly foresaw that his father

would at length be reconciled to him, and therefore thought he should make both his friends if he were instrumental to bring it about. 3. As a statesman, and one concerned for the public welfare. He knew how much Absalom was the darling of the people, and, if David should die while he was in banishment, it might occasion a civil war between those that were for him and those that were against him; for it is probable that though all Israel loved his person, yet they were much divided upon his case. 4. As one who was himself a delinquent, by the murder of Abner. He was conscious to himself of the guilt of blood, and that he was himself obnoxious to public justice, and therefore whatever favour he could procure to be shown to Absalom would corroborate his reprieve.

11. His contrivance to do it by laying somewhat of a parallel case before the king, which was done so dexterously by the person he employed that the king took it for a real case, and gave judgment upon it, as he had done upon Nathan's parable; and, the judgment being in favour of the criminal, the manager might, by that, discover his sentiments so far as to venture upon the application of it, and to show that it was the case of his own family, which, it is probable, she was instructed not to proceed to if the king's judgment upon her case should be severe.

1. The person he employed is not named, but she is said to be a woman of Tekoah, one whom he knew to be fit for such an undertaking: and it was requisite that the scene should be laid at a distance, that David might not think it strange that he had not heard of the case before. It is said, She was a wise woman, one that had a quicker wit and a readier tongue than most of her neighbours, v. 2. The truth of the story would be the less suspected when it came, as was supposed, from the person's own mouth.

2. The character she put on was that of a disconsolate widow, v. 2. Joab knew such a one would have an easy access to the king, who was always ready to comfort the mourners, especially the mourning widows, having himself mentioned it among the titles of God's honour that he is a Judge of the widows, Ps. lxxviii. 5. God's ear, no doubt, is more open to the cries of the afflicted, and his heart too, than that of the most merciful princes on earth can be.

3. It was a case of compassion which she had to represent to the king, and a case in which she could have no relief but from the chancery in the royal breast, the law (and consequently the judgment of all the inferior courts) being against her. She tells the king that she had buried her husband (v. 5),—that she had two sons that were the support and comfort of her widowed state,—that these two (as young men are apt to do) fell out and fought, and one of them unhappily killed the

other (v. 6),—that, for her part, she was desirous to protect the manslayer (for, as Rebekah argued concerning her two sons, *Why should she be deprived of them both in one day?* Gen. xxvii. 45), but though she, who was nearest of kin to the slain, was willing to let fall the demands of an avenger of blood, yet the other relations insisted upon it that the surviving brother should be put to death according to law, not out of any affection either to justice or to the memory of the slain brother, but that, by destroying the heir (which they had the impudence to own was the thing they aimed at), the inheritance might be theirs: and thus they would cut off, (1.) Her comfort: "*They shall quench my coal,* deprive me of the only support of my old age, and put a period to all my joy in this world, which is reduced to this one coal." (2.) Her husband's memory: "*His family will be quite extinct, and they will leave him neither name nor remainder,*" v. 7.

4. The king promised her his favour and a protection for her son. Observe how she improved the king's compassionate concessions. (1.) Upon the representation of her case he promised to consider of it and to give orders about it, v. 8. This was encouraging, that he did not dismiss her petition with "*Currat lex—Let the law take its course;* blood calls for blood, and let it have what it calls for:" but he will take time to enquire whether the allegations of her petition be true. (2.) The woman was not content with this, but begged that he would immediately give judgment in her favour; and if the matter of fact were not as she represented it, and consequently a wrong judgment given upon it, let her bear the blame, and free the king and his throne from guilt, v. 9. Yet her saying this would not acquit the king if he should pass sentence without taking due cognizance of the case. (3.) Being thus pressed, he made a further promise that she should not be injured nor insulted by her adversaries, but he would protect her from all molestation, v. 10. Magistrates ought to be the patrons of oppressed widows. (4.) Yet this does not content her, unless she can get her son's pardon, and protection for him too. Parents are not easy, unless their children be safe, safe for both worlds: "*Let not the avenger of blood destroy my son* (v. 11), for I am undone if I lose him; as good take my life as his. *Therefore let the king remember the Lord thy God,*" that is, [1.] "Let him confirm this merciful sentence with an oath, making mention of the Lord our God, by way of appeal to him, that the sentence may be indisputable and irreversible; and then I shall be easy." See Heb. vi. 17, 18. [2.] "Let him consider what good reason there is for this merciful sentence, and then he himself will be confirmed in it. Remember how gracious and merciful the Lord thy God is, how he hears long with sinners and does not deal with them according

to their deserts, but is ready to forgive. Remember how the Lord thy God spared Cain, who slew his brother, and protected him from the avengers of blood, Gen. iv. 15. Remember how the Lord thy God forgave thee the blood of Uriah, and let the king, that has found mercy, show mercy." Note, Nothing is more proper, nor more powerful, to engage us to every duty, especially to all acts of mercy and kindness, than to remember the Lord our God. (5.) This importunate widow, by pressing the matter thus closely, obtains at last a full pardon for her son, ratified with an oath as she desired: *As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth*, that is, "I will undertake he shall come to no damage upon this account." The Son of David has assured all that put themselves under his protection that, though they should be put to death for his sake, *not a hair of their head shall perish* (Luke xxi. 16—18), though they should lose for him, they shall not lose by him. Whether David did well thus to undertake the protection of a murderer, whom the cities of refuge would not protect, I cannot say. But, as the matter of fact appeared to him, there was not only great reason for compassion to the mother, but room enough for a favourable judgment concerning the son: he had slain his brother, but he *hated him not in time past*; it was upon a sudden provocation, and, for aught that appeared, it might be done in his own defence. He pleaded not this himself, but the judge must be of counsel for the prisoner; and therefore, *Let mercy at this time rejoice against judgment*.

5. The case being thus adjudged in favour of her son, it is now time to apply it to the king's son, Absalom. The mask here begins to be thrown off, and another scene opened. The king is surprised, but not at all displeased, to find his humble petitioner, of a sudden, become his reprover, his privy-counsellor, an advocate for the prince his son, and the mouth of the people, undertaking to represent to him their sentiments. She begs his pardon, and his patience, for what she had further to say (v. 12), and has leave to say it, the king being very well pleased with her wit and humour. (1.) She supposes Absalom's case to be, in effect, the same with that which she had put as her son's; and therefore, if the king would protect her son, though he had slain his brother, much more ought he to protect his own, and to *fetch home his banished*, v. 13. *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur*—*Change but the name, to you the tale belongs*. She names not Absalom, nor needed she to name him. David longed so much after him, and had him so much in his thoughts, that he was soon aware whom she meant by his banished. And in those two words were two arguments which the king's tender spirit felt the force of: "He is banished, and has for three years undergone the disgrace and terror, and all

the inconveniences, of banishment. *Sufficient to such a one is this punishment*. But he is *thy banished*, thy own son, a piece of thyself, thy dear son, whom thou lovest." It is true, Absalom's case differed very much from that which she had put. Absalom did not slay his brother upon a hasty passion, but maliciously, and upon an old grudge; not in the field, where there were no witnesses, but at table, before all his guests. Absalom was not an only son, as hers was; David had many more, and one lately born, more likely to be his successor than Absalom, for he was called *Jedidiah*, because God loved him. But David was himself too well affected to the cause to be critical in his remarks upon the disparity of the cases, and was more desirous than she could be to bring that favourable judgment to his own son which he had given concerning hers. (2.) She reasons upon it with the king, to persuade him to recal Absalom out of banishment, give him his pardon, and take him into his favour again. [1.] She pleads the interest which the people of Israel had in him. "What is done against him is done *against the people of God*, who have their eye upon him as heir of the crown, at least have their eye upon the house of David in general, with which the covenant is made, and which therefore they cannot tamely see the diminution and decay of by the fall of so many of its branches in the flower of their age. Therefore *the king speaks as one that is faulty*, for he will provide that my husband's name and memory be not cut off, and yet takes no care though his own be in danger, which is of more value and importance than ten thousand of ours." [2.] She pleads man's mortality (v. 14): "*We must needs die*. Death is appointed for us; we cannot avoid the thing itself, nor defer it till another time. We are all under a fatal necessity of dying; and, when we are dead, we are past recal, as water spilt upon the ground; nay, even while we are alive, we are so, we have lost our immortality, past retrieve. Amnon must have died, some time, if Absalom had not killed him; and, if Absalom be now put to death for killing him, that will not bring him to life again." This was poor reasoning, and would serve against the punishment of any murderer: but, it should seem, Amnon was a man little regarded by the people and his death little lamented, and it was generally thought hard that so dear a life as Absalom's should go for one so little valued as Amnon's. [3.] She pleads God's mercy and his clemency towards poor guilty sinners: "*God does not take away the soul, or life, but devises means that his banished*, his children that have offended him, and are obnoxious to his justice, as Absalom is to thine, *be not for ever expelled from him*," v. 14. Here are two great instances of the mercy of God to sinners, properly urged as reasons for showing mercy:—*First*, The patience he exercises

inwards them. His law is broken, yet he does not immediately take away the life of those that break it, does not strike sinners dead, as justly he might, in the act of sin, but bears with them, and waits to be gracious. God's vengeance had suffered Absalom to live; why then should not David's justice suffer him? *Secondly*, The provision he has made for their restoration to his favour, that though by sin they have banished themselves from him, yet they might not be expelled, or cast off, for ever. Atonement might be made for sinners by sacrifice. Lepers, and others ceremonially unclean, were banished, but provision was made for their cleansing, that, though for a time excluded, they might not be finally expelled. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. Poor banished sinners are likely to be for ever expelled from God if some course be not taken to prevent it. It is against the mind of God that they should be so, for he is not willing that any should perish. Infinite wisdom has devised proper means to prevent it; so that it is the sinners' own fault if they be cast off. This instance of God's good-will towards us all should incline us to be merciful and compassionate one towards another, Matt. xviii. 32, 33.

6. She concludes her address with high compliments to the king, and strong expressions of her assurance that he would do what was just and kind both in the one case and in the other (v. 15—17); for, as if the case had been real, still she pleads for herself and her son, yet meaning Absalom. (1.) She would not have troubled the king thus, but that the people made her afraid. Understanding it of her own case, all her neighbours made her apprehensive of the ruin she and her son were upon the brink of, from the avengers of blood, the terror of which made her thus bold in her application to the king himself. Understanding it of Absalom's case, she gives the king to understand, what he did not know before, that the nation was disgusted at his severity towards Absalom to such a degree that she was really afraid it would occasion a general mutiny or insurrection, for the preventing of which great mischief she ventured to speak to the king himself. The fright she was in must excuse her rudeness. (2.) She applied to him with a great confidence in his wisdom and clemency: "I said, *I will speak to the king myself*, and ask nobody to speak for me; for the king will hear reason, even from so mean a creature as I am, will hear the cries of the oppressed, and will not suffer the poorest of his subjects to be *destroyed out of the inheritance of God*," that is, "driven out of the land of Israel, to seek for shelter among the uncircumcised, as Absalom is, whose case is so much the worse, that, being shut out of the inheritance of God, he wants God's law and ordinances, which might help to bring him to repentance,

and is in danger of being infected with the idolatry of the heathen among whom he sojourns, and of bringing home the infection. To engage the king to grant her request, she expressed a confident hope that his answer would be comfortable, and such as angels bring (as bishop Patrick explains it), who are messengers of divine mercy. What this woman says by way of compliment the prophet says by way of promise (Zech. xii. 8), that, when *the weak shall be as David, the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord*. "And, in order to this, *the Lord thy God will be with thee*, to assist thee in this and every judgment thou givest." Great expectations are great engagements, especially to persons of honour, to do their utmost not to disappoint those that depend upon them.

7. The hand of Joab is suspected by the king, and acknowledged by the woman, to be in all this, v. 18—20. (1.) The king soon suspected it. For he could not think that such a woman as this would appeal to him, in a matter of such moment, of her own accord; and he knew none so likely to set her on as Joab, who was a politic man and a friend of Absalom. (2.) The woman very honestly owned it: "*Thy servant Joab bade me*. If it be well done, let him have the thanks; if ill, let him bear the blame." Though she found it very agreeable to the king, yet she would not take the praise of it to herself, but speaks the truth as it was, and gives us an example to do likewise, and never to tell a lie for the concealing of a well-managed scheme. *Dare to be true; nothing can need a lie*.

21 And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again. 22 And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant. 23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face. 25 But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26 And when he polled his head, (for it was at every

year's end that he polled *it*: because *the hair* was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight. 27 And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name *was* Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance.

Observe here, I. Orders given for the bringing back of Absalom. The errand on which the woman came to David was so agreeable, and her management of it so very ingenious and surprising, that he was brought into a peculiarly kind humour: *Go* (says he to Joab), *bring the young man Absalom again*, v. 21. He was himself inclined to favour him, yet, for the honour of his justice, he would not do it but upon intercession made for him, which may illustrate the methods of divine grace. It is true God has thoughts of compassion towards poor sinners, not willing that any should perish, yet he is reconciled to them through a Mediator, who intercedes with him on their behalf, and to whom he has given these orders, *Go, bring them again. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*, and he came to this land of our banishment to bring us to God. Joab, having received these orders, 1. Returns thanks to the king for doing him the honour to employ him in an affair so universally grateful, v. 22. Joab took it as a kindness to himself, and (some think) as an indication that he would never call him to an account for the murder he had been guilty of. But, if he meant so, he was mistaken, as we shall find, 1 Kings ii. 5, 6. 2. Delays not to execute David's orders; he brought Absalom to Jerusalem, v. 23. I see not how David can be justified in suspending the execution of the ancient law (Gen. ix. 6), *Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, in which a righteous magistrate ought not to *acknowledge even his brethren, or know his own children*. God's laws were never designed to be like cobwebs, which catch the little flies, but suffer the great ones to break through. God justly made Absalom, whom his foolish pity spared, a scourge to him. But, though he allowed him to return to his own house, he forbade him the court, and would not see him himself, v. 24. He put him under this interdict, (1.) For his own honour, that he might not seem to countenance so great a criminal, nor to forgive him too easily. (2.) For Absalom's greater humiliation. Perhaps he had heard something of his conduct when Joab went to fetch him, which gave him too much reason to think that he was not truly penitent; he therefore put him under this mark of his displeasure, that he might be awakened to a sight of his sin and to sorrow for it, and might make his peace with God, upon the

first notice of which, no doubt, David would be forward to receive him again into his favour.

II. Occasion taken hence to give an account of Absalom. Nothing is said of his wisdom and piety. Though he was the son of such a devout father, we read nothing of his devotion. Parents cannot give grace to their children, though they give them ever so good an education. All that is here said of him is, 1. That he was a very handsome man; there was not his equal in all Israel for beauty, (v. 25), a poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Handsome are those that handsome do. Many a polluted deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body; witness Absalom's, that was polluted with blood, and deformed with unnatural disaffection to his father and prince. In his body there was no blemish, but in his mind nothing but wounds and bruises. Perhaps his comeliness was one reason why his father was so fond of him and protected him from justice. Those have reason to fear affliction in their children who are better pleased with their beauty than with their virtue. 2. That he had a very fine head of hair. Whether it was the length, or colour, or extraordinary softness of it, something there was which made it very valuable and very much an ornament to him, v. 26. This notice is taken of his hair, not as the hair of a Nazarite (he was far from that strictness), but as the hair of a beau. He let it grow till it was a burden to him, and was heavy on him, nor would he cut it as long as ever he could bear it; as pride feels no cold, so it feels no heat, and that which feeds and gratifies it is not complained of, though very uneasy. When he did poll it at certain times, for ostentation he had it weighed, that it might be seen how much it excelled other men's, and it weighed 200 shekels, which some reckon to be three pounds and two ounces of our weight; and with the oil and powder, especially if powdered (as Josephus says the fashion then was) with gold-dust, bishop Patrick thinks it is not at all incredible that it should weigh so much. This fine hair proved his halter, ch. xviii. 9. 3. That his family began to be built up. It is probable that it was a good while before he had a child; and then it was that, despairing of having one, he set up that pillar which is mentioned ch. xviii. 18, to bear up his name; but afterwards he had three sons and one daughter, v. 27. Or perhaps these sons, while he was hatching his rebellion, were all cut off by the righteous hand of God, and thereupon he set up that monument.

28 So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. 29 Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and

when he sent again the second time, he would not come. 30 Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. 31 Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire? 32 And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? *it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.* 33 So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

Three years Absalom had been an exile from his father-in-law, and now two years a prisoner at large in his own house, and, in both, better dealt with than he deserved; yet his spirit was still unhumiliated, his pride unmortified, and, instead of being thankful that his life is spared, he thinks himself sorely wronged that he is not restored to all his places at court. Had he truly repented of his sin, his distance from the gaieties of the court, and his solitude and retirement in his own house, especially being in Jerusalem the holy city, would have been very agreeable to him. If a murderer must live, yet let him be for ever a recluse. But Absalom could not bear this just and gentle mortification. He longed to see the king's face, pretending it was because he loved him, but really because he wanted an opportunity to supplant him. He cannot do his father a mischief till he is reconciled to him; this therefore is the first branch of his plot; this snake cannot sting again till he be warmed in his father's bosom. He gained this point, not by pretended submissions and promises of reformation, but (would you think it?) by insults and injuries. 1. By his insolent carriage towards Joab, he brought him to mediate for him. Once and again he sent to Joab to come and speak with him, for he durst not go to him; but Joab would not come (v. 29), probably because Absalom had not owned the kindness he had done him in bringing him to Jerusalem so gratefully as he thought he should have done; proud men take every service done them for a debt. One would think that a person in Absalom's cir-

cumstances should have sent to Joab a kindly message, and offered him a large gratuity: courtiers expect noble presents. But, instead of this, he bids his servants set Joab's corn-fields on fire (v. 30), as spiteful a thing as he could do. Samson could not think of a greater injury to do the Philistines than this. Strange that Absalom should think, by doing Joab a mischief, to prevail with him to do him a kindness, or to recommend himself to the favour of his prince or people by showing himself so very malicious and ill-natured, and such an enemy to the public good, for the fire might spread to the corn of others. Yet by this means he brings Joab to him, v. 31. Thus God, by afflictions, brings those to him that kept at a distance from him. Absalom was obliged by the law to make restitution (Exod. xxii. 6), yet we do not find either that he offered it or that Joab demanded it. Joab (it might be) thought he could not justify his refusal to go and speak with him; and therefore Absalom thought he could justify his taking this way to fetch him. And now Joab (perhaps frightened at the surprising boldness and fury of Absalom, and apprehensive that he had made an interest in the people strong enough to bear him out in doing the most daring things, else he would never have done this) not only puts up with this injury, but goes on his errand to the king. See what some men can do by threats, and carrying things with a high hand. 2. By his insolent message (for I can call it no better) to the king, he recovered his place at court, to see the king's face, that is, to become a privy counsellor, Esth. i. 14. (1.) His message was haughty and imperious, and very unbecoming either a son or a subject, v. 32. He undervalued the favour that had been shown him in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house, and that in Jerusalem: *Wherefore have I come from Geshur?* He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating that therefore he had been wronged in the rebuke he had been under. He defies the king's justice: "Let him kill me, if he can find in his heart," knowing he loved him too well to do it. (2.) Yet with this message he carried his point, v. 33. David's strong affection for him construed all this to be the language of a great respect to his father, and an earnest desire of his favour, when, alas! it was far otherwise. See how easily wise and good men may be imposed upon by their own children that design ill, especially when they are blindly fond of them. Absalom, by the posture of his body, testified his submission to his father: *He bowed himself on his face to the ground; and David, with a kiss, sealed his pardon.* Did the bowels of a father prevail to reconcile him to an impenitent son, and shall penitent sinners question the compassion of him who is the Father of mercy? If



Ephraim bemoan himself, God soon bemoans him, with all the kind expressions of a fatherly tenderness: *He is a dear son, a pleasant child*, Jer. xxxi. 20.

## CHAP. XV.

Absalom's name signifies "the peace of his father," yet he proves his greatest trouble; so often are we disappointed in our expectations from the creature. The sword entailed upon David's house had hitherto been among his children, but now it begins to be drawn against himself, with this aggravation, that he may thank himself for it, for, had he done justice upon the murderer, he would have prevented the traitor. The story of Absalom's rebellion begins with this chapter, but we must go over three or four more before we see the end of it. In this chapter we have, I. The arts Absalom used to insinuate himself into the people's affections, ver. 1—6. II. His open avowal of his pretensions to the crown at Hebron, whither he went under colour of a vow, and the strong party that appeared for him there, ver. 7—12. III. The notice brought of this to David, and his flight from Jerusalem thereupon, ver. 13—15. In his flight we are told, 1. What passed between him and Ittai, ver. 16—22. 2. The concern of the country for him, ver. 23. 3. His conference with Zadok, ver. 24—29. 4. His tears and prayers upon this occasion, ver. 30, 31. 5. Matters concerted by him with Hushai, ver. 32—37. Now the word of God was fulfilled, that he would "raise up evil against him out of his own house," ch. xii. 11.

AND it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2 And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. 3 And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. 4 Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! 5 And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. 6 And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom is no sooner restored to his place at court than he aims to be in the throne. He that was unhumiliated under his troubles became insufferably proud when they were over; and he cannot be content with the honour of being the king's son, and the prospect of being his successor, but he must be king now. His mother was a king's daughter; on that perhaps he valued himself, and despised his father, who was but the son of Jesse. She was the daughter of a heathen king, which made him the less concerned for the peace of Israel. David, in this unhappy issue of that marriage, smarted for his being unequally yoked with an un-

believer. When Absalom was restored to the king's favour, if he had had any sense of gratitude, he would have studied how to oblige his father, and make him easy; but, on the contrary, he meditates how to undermine him, by stealing the hearts of the people from him. Two things recommend a man to popular esteem—greatness and goodness.

I. Absalom looks great, v. 1. He had learned of the king of Geshur (what was not allowed to the kings of Israel) to multiply horses, which made him look desirable, while his father, on his mule, looked despicable. The people desired a king like the nations; and such a one Absalom will be, appearing in pomp and magnificence, above what had been seen in Jerusalem. Samuel had foretold that this would be *the manner of the king: He shall have chariots and horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots* (1 Sam. viii. 11); and this is Absalom's manner. Fifty footmen (in rich liveries we may suppose) running before him, to give notice of his approach, would highly gratify his pride and the people's foolish fancy. David thinks that this parade is designed only to grace his court, and connives at it. Those parents know not what they do who indulge a proud humour in their children; for I have seen more young people ruined by pride than by any one lust whatsoever.

II. Absalom will seem very good too, but with a very bad design. Had he proved himself a good son and a good subject, and set himself to serve his father's interest, he would have done his present duty, and shown himself worthy of future honours, after his father's death. Those that know how to obey well know how to rule. But to show how good a judge and how good a king he will be is but to deceive himself and others. Those are good indeed that are good in their own place, not that pretend how good they would be in other people's places. But this is all the goodness we find in Absalom.

1. He wishes that he were a judge in Israel, v. 4. He had all the pomp and all the pleasure he could wish, lived as great and in as much ease as any man could; yet this will not content him, unless he have power too: *O that I were a judge in Israel!* He that should himself have been judged to death for murder has the impudence to aim at being a judge of others. We read not of Absalom's wisdom, virtue, or learning in the laws, nor had he given any proofs of his love to justice, but the contrary; yet he wishes he were judge. Note, Those are commonly most ambitious of preferment that are least fit for it; the best qualified are the most modest and self-diffident, while it is no better than the spirit of an Absalom that says, *O that I were a judge in Israel!*

2. He takes a very bad course for the accomplishing of his wish. Had he humbly petitioned his father to employ him in the administration of justice, and studied to qualify himself for it (according to the rule,

Exod. xviii. 21), no doubt he would have been sure of the next judge's place that fell; but this is too mean a post for his proud spirit. It is below him to be subordinate, though to the king his father; he must be supreme or nothing. He wants to be such a judge that every man who has any cause shall come to him: in all causes, and over all persons, he must preside, little thinking what a fatigue this would be to have every man come to him. Moses himself could not bear it. Those know not what power is that grasp at so much, so very much. To gain the power he aims at, he endeavours to instil into the people's minds,

(1.) A bad opinion of the present administration, as if the affairs of the kingdom were altogether neglected, and no care taken about them. He got round him all he could that had business at the council-board, enquired what their business was; and, [1.] Upon a slight and general enquiry into their cause, he pronounced it good: *Thy matters are right.* A fit man indeed to be a judge, who would give judgment upon hearing one side only! For he has a bad cause indeed that cannot put a good colour upon it, when he himself has the telling of the story. But, [2.] He told them that it was to no purpose to appeal to the throne: "*There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.* The king is himself old, and past business, or so taken up with his devotions that he never minds business; his sons are so addicted to their pleasures that, though they have the name of chief rulers, they take no care of the affairs committed to them." He further seems to insinuate what a great want there was of him while he was banished and confined, and how much the public suffered by his exile; what his father said truly in Saul's reign (Ps. lxxv. 3) he says falsely: *The land and all the inhabitants of it are dissolved, all will go to wreck and ruin, unless I bear up the pillars of it.* Every appellant shall be made to believe that he will never have justice done him, unless Absalom be viceroy or lord-justice. It is the way of turbulent, factious, aspiring men, to reproach the government they are under. *Presumptuous are they, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities,* 2 Pet. ii. 10. Even David himself, the best of kings, and his administration, could not escape the worst of censures. Those that aim to usurp cry out of grievances, and pretend to design nothing but the redress of them: as Absalom here.

(2.) A good opinion of his own fitness to rule. That the people might say, "O that Absalom were a judge!" (and they are apt enough to desire changes), he recommends himself to them, [1.] As very diligent. He rose up early, and appeared in public before the rest of the king's sons were stirring, and he stood beside the way of the gate, where the courts of judgment sat, as one mightily concerned to see justice done and public

business despatched. [2.] As very inquisitive and prying, and desirous to be acquainted with every one's case. He would know of what city every one was that came for judgment, that he might inform himself concerning every part of the kingdom and the state of it, v. 2. [3.] As very familiar and humble. If any Israelite offered to do obeisance to him he took him and embraced him as a friend. No man's conduct could be more condescending, while his heart was as proud as Lucifer's. Ambitious projects are often carried on by a *show of humility*, Col. ii. 23. He knew what a grace it puts upon greatness to be affable and courteous, and how much it wins upon common people: had he been sincere in it, it would have been his praise; but to fawn upon the people that he might betray them was abominable hypocrisy. *He croucheth, and humbleth himself, to draw them into his net,* Ps. x. 9, 10.

7 And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. 8 For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. 9 And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. 10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. 11 And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. 12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong: for the people increased continually with Absalom.

We have here the breaking out of Absalom's rebellion, which he had long been contriving. It is said to be *after forty years*, v. 7. But whence it is to be dated we are not told; not from David's beginning his reign, for then it would fall in the last year of his life, which is not probable; but either from his first anointing by Samuel seven years before, or rather (I think) from the people's desiring a king, and the first change of the government into a monarchy, which might be about ten years before David began to reign: it is fitly dated thence, to show that the same restless spirit was still work-

ing, and still they were given to change: as fond now of a new man as then of a new model. So it fell about the thirtieth year of David's reign. Absalom's plot being now ripe for execution,

I. The place he chose for the rendezvous of his party was Hebron, the place where he was born, and where his father began his reign and continued it several years, which would give some advantage to his pretensions. Every one knew Hebron to be a royal city; and it lay in the heart of Judah's lot, in which tribe, probably, he thought his interest strong.

II. The pretence he had both to go thither and to invite his friends to him there was to offer a sacrifice to God, in performance of a vow he had made during his banishment, *v. 7, 8*. We have cause enough to suspect that he had not made any such vow; it does not appear that he was so religiously inclined. But he that stuck not at murder and treason would not make conscience of a lie to serve his purpose. If he said he had made such a vow, nobody could disprove him. Under this pretence, 1. He got leave of his father to go to Hebron. David would be well pleased to hear that his son, in his exile, was so desirous to return to Jerusalem, not only his father's city, but the city of the living God,—that he looked up to God, to bring him back,—that he had vowed, if he were brought back, to serve the Lord, whose service he had hitherto neglected,—and that now, being brought back, he remembered his vow, and resolved to perform it. If he think fit to do it in Hebron, rather than in Sion or Gibeon, the good king is so well pleased with the thing itself that he will not object against his choice of the place. See how willing tender parents are to believe the best concerning their children, and, upon the least indication of good, to hope, even concerning those that have been untoward, that they will repent and reform. But how easy is it for children to take advantage of their good parents' credulity, and to impose upon them with the show of religion, while still they are what they were! David was overjoyed to hear that Absalom inclined to *serve the Lord*, and therefore readily gave him leave to go to Hebron, and to go thither with solemnity. 2. He got a good number of sober substantial citizens to go along with him, *v. 11*. There went 200 men, probably of the principal men of Jerusalem, whom he invited to join with him in his feast upon his sacrifice; and they went in their simplicity, not in the least suspecting that Absalom had any bad design in this journey. He knew that it was to no purpose to tempt them into his plot: they were inviolably firm to David. But he drew them in to accompany him, that the common people might think that they were in his interest, and that David was deserted by some of his best friends. Note. It is no new thing for very good men,

and very good things, to be made use of by designing men to put a colour upon bad practices. When religion is made a stalking-horse, and sacrifice a shoeing-horn, to sedition and usurpation it is not to be wondered at if some that were well affected to religion, as these followers of Absalom here, are imposed upon by the fallacy, and drawn in to give countenance to that, with their names, which in their heart they abhor, not having known the depths of Satan.

III. The project he laid was to get himself proclaimed king throughout all the tribes of Israel upon a signal given, *v. 10*. Spies were sent abroad, to be ready in every country to receive the notice with satisfaction and acclamations of joy, and to make the people believe that the news was both very true and very good, and that they were all concerned to take up arms for their new king. Upon the sudden spreading of this proclamation, "*Absalom reigns in Hebron,*" some would conclude that David was dead, others that he had resigned: and thus those that were in the secret would draw in many to appear for Absalom, and to come in to his assistance, who, if they had rightly understood the matter, would have abhorred the thought of it, but, being drawn in, would adhere to him. See what artifices ambitious men use for the compassing of their ends; and in matters of state, as well as in matters of religion, let us not be forward to believe every spirit, but try the spirits.

IV. The person he especially courted and relied upon in this affair was Ahithophel, a politic thinking man, and one that had a clear head and a great compass of thought, that had been David's counsellor, his guide and his acquaintance (*Ps. lv. 13*), his *familiar friend, in whom he trusted, who did eat of his bread*, *Ps. xli. 9*. But, upon some disgust of David's against him, or his against David, he was banished, or retired from public business, and lived privately in the country. How should a man of such good principles as David, and a man of such corrupt principles as Ahithophel, long agree? A fitter tool Absalom could not find in all the kingdom than one that was so great a statesman, and yet was disaffected to the present ministry. While Absalom was offering his sacrifices, in performance of his pretended vow, he sent for this man. So much was his heart on the projects of his ambition that he could not stay to make an end of his devotion, which showed what his eye was upon in all, and that it was but for a pretence that he made long offerings.

V. The party that joined with him proved at last very considerable. The people increased continually with Absalom, which made the conspiracy strong and formidable. Every one whom he had complimented and caressed (pronouncing his matters right and good, especially if afterwards the cause went against him) not only came himself, but

made all the interest he could for him, so that he wanted not for numbers. The majority is no certain rule to judge of equity by. *All the world wondered after the beast.* Whether Absalom formed this design merely in the height of his ambition and fondness to rule, or whether there was not in it also malice against his father and revenge for his banishment and confinement, though this punishment was so much less than he deserved, does not appear. But, generally, that which aims at the crown aims at the head that wears it.

13 And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. 14 And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. 15 And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. 16 And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house. 17 And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. 18 And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king. 19 Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. 20 Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. 21 And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. 22 And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that

were with him. 23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

Here is, I. The notice brought to David of Absalom's rebellion, v. 13. The matter was bad enough, and yet it seems to have been made worse to him (as such things commonly are) than really it was; for he was told that *the hearts of the men of Israel* (that is, the generality of them, at least the leading men) were after Absalom. But David was the more apt to believe it because now he could call to mind the arts that Absalom had used to inveigle them, and perhaps reflected upon it with regret that he had not done more to counterwork him, and secure his own interest, which he had been too confident of. Note, It is the wisdom of princes to make sure of the hearts of their subjects; for, if they have them, they have their purses, and arms, and all, at their service.

II. The alarm this gave to David, and the resolutions he came to thereupon. We may well imagine him in a manner thunderstruck, when he heard that the son he loved so dearly, and had been so indulgent to, was so unnaturally and ungratefully in arms against him. Well might he say with Cæsar, *Kai oû τεκνον—What, thou my son?* Let not parents raise their hopes too high from their children, lest they be disappointed. David did not call a council, but, consulting only with God and his own heart, determined immediately to quit Jerusalem, v. 14. He took up this strange resolve, so disagreeable to his character as a man of courage, either, 1. As a penitent, submitting to the rod, and lying down under God's correcting hand. Conscience now reminded him of his sin in the matter of Uriah, and the sentence he was under for it, which was that *evil should arise against him out of his own house.* "Now," thinks he, "the word of God begins to be fulfilled, and it is not for me to contend with it or fight against it; God is righteous and I submit." Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself and stand it out; but before the righteous God he must condemn himself and yield to his judgments. Thus he accepts the punishment of his iniquity. Or, 2. As a politician. Jerusalem was a great city, but not tenable: it should seem, by David's prayer (Ps. li. 18), that the walls of it were not built up, much less was it regularly fortified. It was too large to be garrisoned by so small a force as David had now with him. He had reason to fear that the generality of the inhabitants were too well affected to Absalom to be true to him. Should he fortify himself here, he might lose the country, in which, especially among

those that lay furthest from Absalom's tampering, he hoped to have the most friends. And he had such a kindness for Jerusalem that he was loth to make it the seat of war, and expose it to the calamities of a siege; he will rather quit it tamely to the rebels. Note, Good men, when they suffer themselves, care not how few are involved with them in suffering.

III. His hasty flight from Jerusalem. His servants agreed to the measures he took, faithfully adhered to him (v. 15), and assured him of their inviolable allegiance, whereupon, 1. He went out of Jerusalem himself on foot, while his son Absalom had chariots and horses. It is not always the best man, nor the best cause, that makes the best figure. See here, not only the servant, but the traitor, on horseback, while the prince, the rightful prince, *walks as a servant upon the earth*, Eccl. x. 7. Thus he chose to do, to abase himself so much the more under God's hand, and in condescension to his friends and followers, with whom he would walk, in token that he would live and die with them. 2. He took his household with him, his wives and children, that he might protect them in this day of danger, and that they might be a comfort to him in this day of grief. Masters of families; in their greatest frights, must not neglect their households. *Ten women, that were concubines, he left behind, to keep the house*, thinking that the weakness of their sex would secure them from murder, and their age and relation to him would secure them from rape; but God overruled this for the fulfilling of his word. 3. He took his life-guard with him, or band of pensioners, the Cherethites and Pelethites, who were under the command of Benaiah, and the Gittites, who were under the command of Ittai, v. 18. These Gittites seem to have been, by birth, Philistines of Gath, who came, a regiment of them, 600 in all, to enter themselves in David's service, having known him at Gath, and being greatly in love with him for his virtue and piety, and having embraced the Jews' religion. David made them of his *garde du corps*—his *body-guard*, and they adhered to him in his distress. The Son of David found not such great faith in Israel as in a Roman centurion and a woman of Canaan. 4. As many as would, of the people of Jerusalem, he took with him, and made a halt at some distance from the city, to draw them up, v. 17. He compelled none. Those whose hearts were with Absalom, to Absalom let them go, and so shall their doom be: they will soon have enough of him. Christ enlists none but volunteers.

IV. His discourse with Ittai the Gittite, who commanded the Philistine-proselytes.

1. David dissuaded him from going along with him, v. 19, 20. Though he and his men might be greatly serviceable to him, yet, (1.) He would try whether he was hearty for him, and not inclined to Absalom. He

therefore bids him return to his post in Jerusalem, and serve the new king. If he was no more than a soldier of fortune (as we say), he would be for that side which would pay and prefer him best; and to that side let him go. (2.) If he was faithful to David, yet David would not have him exposed to the fatigues and perils he now counted upon. David's tender spirit cannot bear to think that a stranger and an exile, a proselyte and a new convert, who ought, by all means possible, to be encouraged and made easy, should, at his first coming, meet with such hard usage: "*Should I make thee go up and down with us?*" No, return with thy brethren." Generous souls are more concerned at the share others have in their troubles than at their own. Ittai shall therefore be dismissed with a blessing: *Mercy and truth be with thee*, that is, God's mercy and truth, mercy according to promise, the promise made to those who renounce other gods and put themselves under the wings of the divine Majesty. This is a very proper pious farewell, when we part with a friend, "*Mercy and truth be with thee*, and then thou art safe, and mayest be easy, wherever thou art." David's dependence was upon the mercy and truth of God for comfort and happiness, both for himself and his friends; see Ps. lxi. 7.

2. Ittai bravely resolved not to leave him, v. 21. Where David is, *whether in life or death*, safe or in peril, there will this faithful friend of his be; and he confirms this resolution with an oath, that he might not be tempted to break it. Such a value has he for David, not for the sake of his wealth and greatness (for then he would have deserted him now that he saw him thus reduced), but for the sake of his wisdom and goodness, which were still the same, that, whatever comes of it, he will never leave him. Note, That is a friend indeed who loves at all times, and will adhere to us in adversity. Thus should we cleave to the Son of David with full purpose of heart that *neither life nor death shall separate us from his love*.

V. The common people's sympathy with David in his affliction. When he and his attendants *passed over the brook Kidron* (the very same brook that Christ passed over when he entered upon his sufferings, John xviii. 1), *towards the way of the wilderness*, which lay between Jerusalem and Jericho, *all the country wept with a loud voice*, v. 23. Cause enough there was for weeping, 1. To see a prince thus reduced, one that had lived so great forced from his palace and in fear of his life, with a small retinue seeking shelter in a desert, to see the city of David, which he himself won, built, and fortified, made an unsafe abode for David himself. It would move the compassion even of strangers to see a man fallen thus low from such a height, and this by the wickedness of his own son; a piteous case it was. Parents that are abused and ruined by their own children

merit the tender sympathy of their friends as much as any of the sons or daughters of affliction. Especially, 2. To see their own prince thus wronged, who had been so great a blessing to their land, and had not done any thing to forfeit the affections of his people; to see him in this distress, and themselves unable to help him, might well draw floods of tears from their eyes.

24 And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. 25 And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: 26 But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, *here am I*, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. 27 The king said also unto Zadok the priest, *Art not thou a seer?* return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me. 29 Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. 30 And David went up by the ascent of *mount Olivet*, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

Here we have, I. The fidelity of the priests and Levites and their firm adherence to David and his interest. They knew David's great affection to them and their office, notwithstanding his failings. The method Absalom took to gain people's affections made no impression upon them; he had little religion in him, and therefore they steadily adhered to David. Zadok and Abiathar, and all the Levites, if he go, will accompany him, and take the ark with them, that, by it, they may ask counsel of God for him, v. 24. Note, Those that are friends to the ark in their prosperity will find it a friend to them in their adversity. Formerly David would not rest till he had found a resting-place for the ark; and now, if the priests may have their mind, the ark shall not rest till David return to his rest.

II. David's dismissal of them back into the city, v. 25, 26. Abiathar was high priest (1 Kings ii. 35), but Zadok was his assistant, and attended the ark most closely, while Abiathar was active in public business, v. 24. Therefore David directs his speech to Zadok, and an excellent speech it is, and shows him to be in a very good frame under his affliction, and that still he holds fast his integrity.

1. He is very solicitous for the safety of the ark: "By all means carry the ark back into the city, let not that be unsettled and exposed with me, lodge that again in the tent pitched for it; surely Absalom, bad as he is, will do that no harm." David's heart, like Eli's, trembles for the ark of God. Note, It argues a good principle to be more concerned for the church's prosperity than for our own, to prefer *Jerusalem* before our chief joy (Ps. cxxxvii. 6), the success of the gospel, and the flourishing of the church, above our own wealth, credit, ease, and safety, even when they are most in hazard. 2. He is very desirous to return to the enjoyment of the privileges of God's house. He will reckon it the greatest instance of God's favour to him if he may but once more be brought back to see it and his habitation. This will be more his joy than to be brought back to his own palace and throne again. Note, Gracious souls measure their comforts and conveniences in this world by the opportunity they give them of communion with God. Hezekiah wished for the recovery of his health for this reason, that he might go up to the house of the Lord, Isa. xxxviii. 22. 3. He is very submissive to the holy will of God concerning the issue of this dark dispensation. He hopes the best (v. 25), and hopes for it from the favour of God, which he looks upon to be the fountain of all good: "If God favour me so far, I shall be settled again as formerly." But he provides for the worst: "If he deny me this favour—if he thus say, *I have no delight in thee*—I know I deserve the continuance of his displeasure; his holy will be done." See him here patiently awaiting the event: "*Behold, here am I*, as a servant expecting orders;" and see him willing to commit himself to God concerning it: "*Let him do to me as seemeth good to him*. I have nothing to object. All is well that God does." Observe with what satisfaction and holy complacency he speaks of the divine disposal: not only, "He can do what he will," subscribing to his power (Job ix. 12), or, "He has a right to do what he will," subscribing to his sovereignty (Job xxxiii. 13), or, "He will do what he will," subscribing to his unchangeableness (Job xxiii. 13, 15), but, "*Let him do what he will*," subscribing to his wisdom and goodness. Note, It is our interest, as well as duty, cheerfully to acquiesce in the will of God, whatever befalls us. That we may not complain of what is, let us see God's hand in all events; and, that we may not be afraid of

what shall be, let us see all events in God's hand.

III. The confidence David put in the priests that they would serve his interest to the utmost of their power in his absence. He calls Zadok a *seer* (v. 27), that is, a wise man, a man that can see into business and discern time and judgment: "Thou hast thy eyes in thy head (Eccl. ii. 14), and therefore art capable of doing me service, especially by sending me intelligence of the enemy's motions and resolutions." One friend that is a seer, in such an exigency as this, was worth twenty that were not so quick-sighted. For the settling of a private correspondence with the priests in his absence, he appoints, 1. Whom they should send to him—their two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, whose coat, it might be hoped, would be their protection, and of whose prudence and faithfulness he had probably had experience. 2. Whither they should send. He would encamp in the plain of the wilderness till he heard from them (v. 28), and then would move according to the information and advice they should send him. Hereupon they returned to the city, to await the event. It was a pity that any disturbance should be given to a state so happy as this was, when the prince and the priests had such an entire affection for and confidence in each other.

IV. The melancholy posture that David and his men put themselves into, when, at the beginning of their march, they went up the mount of Olives, v. 30.

1. David himself, as a deep mourner, covered his head and face for shame and blushing, went bare-foot, as a prisoner or a slave, for mortification, and went weeping. Did it become a man of his reputation for courage and greatness of spirit thus to cry like a child, only for fear of an enemy at a distance, against whom he might easily have made head, and perhaps with one bold stroke have routed him? Yes, it did not ill become him, considering how much there was in this trouble, (1.) Of the unkindness of his son. He could not but weep to think that one who came out of his bowels, and had so often lain in his arms, should thus lift up the heel against him. God himself is said to be grieved with the rebellions of his own children (Ps. xcvi. 10) and even broken with their whorish heart, Ezek. vi. 9. (2.) There was much of the displeasure of his God in it. This infused the wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery, Lam. iii. 19. His sin was ever before him (Ps. li. 3), but never so plain nor ever appearing so black as now. He never wept thus when Saul hunted him: but a wounded conscience makes troubles lie heavily, Ps. xxxviii. 4.

2. When David wept all his company wept likewise, being much affected with his grief and willing to share in it. It is our duty to weep with those that weep, especially our superiors, and those that are better than

we; for, if this be done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry? We must weep with those that weep for sin. When Hezekiah humbled himself for his sin all Jerusalem joined with him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 26. To prevent suffering with sinners, let us sorrow with them.

31 And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. 32 And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head: 33 Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: 34 But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. 35 And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear. 37 So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

Nothing, it seems, appeared to David more threatening in Absalom's plot than that Ahithophel was in it; for one good head, in such a design, is worth a thousand good hands. Absalom was himself no politician, but he had got one entirely in his interest that was, and would be the more dangerous because he had been all along acquainted with David's counsels and affairs; if therefore he can be baffled, Absalom is as good as routed and the head of the conspiracy cut off. This David endeavours to do.

I. By prayer. When he heard that Ahithophel was in the plot he lifted up his heart to God in this short prayer: *Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, v. 31.* He had not opportunity for a long prayer, but he was not one of those that thought he should be heard for his much speaking. It was a fervent prayer: "Lord, I pray thee, do this." God is well pleased with the im-

portunity of those that come to him with their petitions. David is particular in this prayer; he names the person whose counsels he prays against. God gives us leave, in prayer, to be humbly and reverently free with him, and to mention the particular care, and fear, and grief, that lies heavily upon us. David prayed not against Ahithophel's person, but against his counsel, that God would *turn it into foolishness*, that, though he was a wise man, he might at this time give foolish counsel, or, if he gave wise counsel, that it might be rejected as foolish, or, if it were followed, that by some providence or other it might be defeated, and not attain the end. David prayed this in a firm belief that God has all hearts in his hand, and tongues too, that, when he pleases, he can *take away the understanding of the aged and make the judges fools*, (Job xii. 17; Isa. iii. 2, 3), and in hope that God would own and plead his just and injured cause. Note, We may pray in faith, and should pray with fervency, that God will turn that counsel into foolishness which is taken against his people.

II. By policy. We must second our prayer with our endeavours, else we tempt God. It is good service to countermin the policy of the church's enemies. When David came to the top of the mount, he *worshipped God*, v. 32. Note, Weeping must not hinder worshipping, but quicken it rather. Now he penned the third Psalm, as appears by the title; and some think that his singing this was the worship he now paid to God. Just now Providence brought Hushai to him. While he was yet speaking, God heard, and sent him the person that should be instrumental to befool Ahithophel. He came to condole with David on his present trouble, with his coat rent and earth upon his head; but David, having a great deal of confidence in his conduct and faithfulness, resolved to employ him as a spy upon Absalom. He would not take him with him (v. 33), for he had now more need of soldiers than counsellors, but sent him back to Jerusalem, to wait for Absalom's arrival, as a deserter from David, and to offer him his service, v. 34. Thus he might insinuate himself into his counsels, and defeat Ahithophel, either by dissuading Absalom from following his advice or by discovering it to David, that he might know where to stand upon his guard. How this gross dissimulation, which David put Hushai upon, can be justified, as a stratagem in war, I do not see. The best that can be made of it is that Absalom, if he rebel against his father, must stand upon his guard against all mankind, and, if he will be deceived, let him be deceived. David recommended Hushai to Zadok and Abiathar, as persons proper to be consulted with (v. 35), and to their two sons, as trusty men to be sent on errands to David, v. 36. Hushai, thus instructed, came to Jerusalem (v. 37), whither also Absalom soon after came with his forces.

How soon do royal palaces and royal cities change their masters! But we look for a kingdom which cannot be thus shaken and in the possession of which we cannot be disturbed.

## CHAP. XVI.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left David flying from Jerusalem, and Absalom entering into it; in this chapter, I. We are to follow David in his melancholy flight; and there we find him, 1. Cheated by Ziba, ver. 1—4. 2. Cursed by Shimei, which he bears with wonderful patience, ver. 5—11. 3. We are to meet Absalom in his triumphant entry; and there we find him, 1. Cheated by Hushai, ver. 15—19. 2. Counsell'd by Ahithophel to go in unto his father's concubines, ver. 20—23.

AND when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. 2 And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. 3 And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. 4 Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king.

We read before how kind David was to Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, how he prudently entrusted his servant Ziba with the management of his estate, while he generously entertained him at his own table, ch. ix. 10. This matter was well settled; but, it seems, Ziba is not content to be manager, he longs to be master, of Mephibosheth's estate. Now, he thinks, is his time to make himself so; if he can procure a grant of it from the crown, whether David or Absalom get the better it is all one to him, he hopes he shall secure his prey, which he promises himself by fishing in troubled waters. In order hereunto, 1. He made David a handsome present of provisions, which was the more welcome because it came seasonably (v. 1), and with this he designed to incline him to himself; for a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men, Prov. xviii. 16. Nay, Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth, Prov. xvii. 8. David inferred from this that Ziba was a very dis-



creet and generous man, and well affected to him, when, in all, he designed nothing but to make his own market and to get Mephibosheth's estate settled upon himself. Shall the prospect of advantage in this world make men generous to the rich? and shall not the belief of an abundant recompence in the resurrection of the just make us charitable to the poor? Luke xiv. 14. Ziba was very considerate in the present he brought to David; it was what would do him some good in his present distress, v. 2. Observe, The wine was intended for those that were faint, not for the king's own drinking, or the courtiers; it seems, they did not commonly use it, but it was for cordials for those *that were ready to perish*, Prov. xxxi. 6. Blessed art thou, O land! when thy princes use wine for strength, as David did, and not for drunkenness, as Absalom did, ch. xiii. 28. See Eccl. x. 17. Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it to David for his support very graciously. God makes use of bad men for good purposes to his people, and sends them meat by ravens. 2. Having by his present insinuated himself into David's affection, and gained credit with him, the next thing he has to do for the compassing of his end is to incense him against Mephibosheth, which he does by a false accusation, representing him as ungratefully designing to raise himself by the present broils, and to recover the crown to his own head, now that David and his son were contending for it. David enquires for him as one of his family, which gives Ziba occasion to tell this false story of him, v. 3. What immense damages do masters often sustain by the lying tongues of their servants! David knew Mephibosheth not to be an ambitious man, but easy in his place, and well-affected to him and his government; nor could he be so weak as to expect with his lame legs to climb the ladder of preferment; yet David gives credit to the calumny, and, without further enquiry or consideration, convicts Mephibosheth of treason, seizes his lands as forfeited, and grants them to Ziba: *Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth* (v. 4), a rash judgment, and which afterwards he was ashamed of, when the truth came to light, ch. xix. 29. Princes cannot help it, but they will be sometimes (as our law speaks) deceived in their grants; but they ought to use all means possible to discover the truth and to guard against malicious designing men, who would impose upon them, as Ziba did upon David. Having by his wiles gained his point, Ziba secretly laughed at the king's credulity, congratulated himself on his success, and departed, with a great compliment upon the king, that he valued his favour more than Mephibosheth's estate: "Let me find grace in thy sight, O king! and I have enough." Great men ought always to be jealous of flatterers, and remember that nature has given them two ears, that they may hear both sides.

5 And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. 6 And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. 7 And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: 8 The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. 9 Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. 10 And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? 11 And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him. 12 It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day. 13 And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. 14 And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

We here find how David bore Shimei's curses much better than he had borne Ziba's flatteries. By the latter he was brought to pass a wrong judgment on another, by the former to pass a right judgment on himself. The world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns. Observe here,

1. How insolent and furious Shimei was and how his malice took occasion from Da-

vid's present distress to be so much the more outrageous. David, in his flight, had come to Bahurim, a city of Benjamin in or near which this Shimei lived, who, being of the house of Saul (with the fall of which all his hopes of preferment fell), had an implacable enmity to David, unjustly looking upon him as the ruin of Saul and his family only because, by the divine appointment, he succeeded Saul. While David was in prosperity and power, Shimei hated him as much as he did now, but he durst not then say anything against him. God knows what is in the hearts of those that are disaffected to him and his government, but earthly princes do not. Now he came forth, and cursed David with all the bad words and wishes he could invent, v. 5. Observe,

1. Why he took this opportunity to give vent to his malice. (1.) Because now he thought he might do it safely; yet, if David had thought proper to resent the provocation, it would have cost Shimei his life. (2.) Because now it would be most grievous to David, would add affliction to his grief, and pour vinegar into his wounds. He complains of those as most barbarous who *talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded*, Ps. lxxix. 26. So Shimei did, loading him with curses whom no generous eye could look upon without compassion. (3.) Because now he thought that Providence justified his reproaches, and that David's present afflictions proved him to be as bad a man as he was willing to represent him. Job's friends condemned him upon this false principle. Those that are under the rebukes of a gracious God must not think it strange if these bring upon them the reproaches of evil men. If once it be said, *God hath forsaken him*, presently it follows, *Persecute and take him*, Ps. lxxi. 11. But it is the character of a base spirit thus to trample upon those that are down, and insult over them.

2. How his malice was expressed. See, (1.) What this wretched man did: *He cast stones at David* (v. 6), as if his king had been a dog, or the worst of criminals, whom all Israel must stone with stones till he die. Perhaps he kept at such a distance that the stones he threw could not reach David, nor any of his attendants, yet he showed what he would have done if it had been in his power. *He cast dust* (v. 13), which, probably, would blow into his own eyes, like the curses he threw, which, being causeless, would return upon his own head. Thus, while his malice made him odious, the impotency of it made him ridiculous and contemptible. Those that fight against God cannot hurt him, though they hate him. *If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him?* Job xxxv. 6. It was an aggravation of his wickedness that David was attended with his mighty men on his right hand and on his left, so that he was not in so forlorn a condition as he thought (*persecuted but not forsaken*), and that he continued

to do it, and did it the more passionately, for David's bearing it patiently. (2.) What he said. With the stones he shot his arrows, even bitter words (v. 7, 8), in contempt of that law, *Thou shalt not curse the gods*, Exod. xxii. 28. David was a man of honour and conscience, and in great reputation for every thing that was just and good; what could this foul mouth say against him? Why, truly, what was done long since to the house of Saul was the only thing which he could recollect, and with this he upbraided David because it was the thing that he himself was a loser by. See how apt we are to judge of men and their character by what they are to us, and to conclude that those are certainly evil men that have ever so justly been, or that we ever so unjustly think have been, instruments of evil to us. So partial are we to ourselves that no rule can be more fallacious than this. No man could be more innocent of the blood of the house of Saul than David was. Once and again he spared Saul's life, while Saul sought his. When Saul and his sons were slain by the Philistines and David his men were many miles off; and, when they heard it, they lamented it. From the murder of Abner and Ish-bosheth he had sufficiently cleared himself; and yet all *the blood of the house of Saul* must be laid at his door. Innocency is no fence against malice and falsehood; nor are we to think it strange if we be charged with that from which we have been most careful to keep ourselves. It is well for us that men are not to be our judges, but he whose judgment is according to truth. The blood of the house of Saul is here most unjustly charged upon David, [1.] As that which gave him his character, and denominated him a bloody man and a man of Belial, v. 7. And, if a man of blood, no doubt a man of Belial, that is, a child of the devil, who is called *Belial* (2 Cor. vi. 15), and who was a murderer from the beginning. Bloody men are the worst of men. [2.] As that which brought the present trouble upon him: "Now that thou art dethroned, and driven out to the wilderness, *the Lord has returned upon thee the blood of the house of Saul.*" See how forward malicious men are to press God's judgments into the service of their own passion and revenge. If any who have, as they think, wronged them, should come into trouble, the injury done to them must be made the cause of the trouble. But we must take heed lest we wrong God by making his providence thus to patronise our foolish and unjust resentments. As *the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God serves not the wrath of man. [3.] As that which would now be his utter ruin; for he endeavours to make him despair of ever recovering his throne again. Now they said, *There is no help for him in God* (Ps. iii. 2), *the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom* (not Me- phibosheth—the house of Saul) never dreamed

of making *him* king, as Ziba suggested), and *thou art taken in thy mischief*, that is, "the mischief that will be thy destruction, and all because thou art a bloody man." Thus Shimei cursed.

II. See how patient and submissive David was under this abuse. The sons of Zeruah, Abishai particularly, were forward to maintain David's honour with their swords; they resented the affront keenly, as well they might: *Why should this dead dog* he suffered to *curse the king?* v. 9. If David will but give them leave, they will put these lying cursing lips to silence, and take off his head; for his throwing stones at the king was an overt act, which abundantly proved that he compassed and imagined his death. But the king would by no means suffer it: *What have I to do with you?* So let him curse. Thus Christ rebuked the disciples, who, in zeal for his honour, would have commanded fire from heaven on the town that affronted him, Luke ix. 55. Let us see with what considerations David quieted himself. 1. The chief thing that silenced him was that he had deserved this affliction. This is not mentioned indeed; for a man may truly repent, and yet needs not, upon all occasions, proclaim his penitent reflections. Shimei unjustly upbraided him with the blood of Saul: from *that* his conscience acquitted him, but, at the same time, it charged him with the blood of Uriah. "The reproach is too true" (thinks David), "though false as he means it." Note, A humble tender spirit will turn reproaches into reproofs, and so get good by them, instead of being provoked by them. 2. He observes the hand of God in it: *The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David* (v. 10), and again, *So let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him*, v. 11. As it was Shimei's sin, it was not from God, but from the devil and his own wicked heart, nor did God's hand in it excuse or extenuate it, much less justify it, any more than it did the sin of those who put Christ to death, Acts ii. 23; iv. 28. But, as it was David's affliction, it was from the Lord, one of the evils which he raised up against him. David looked above the instrument of his trouble to the supreme director, as Job, when the plunderers had stripped him, acknowledged, *The Lord hath taken away*. Nothing more proper to quiet a gracious soul under affliction than an eye to the hand of God in it. *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it*. The scourge of the tongue is God's rod. 3. He quiets himself under the less affliction with the consideration of the greater (v. 11): *My son seeks my life, much more may this Benjamite*. Note, Tribulation works patience in those that are sanctified. The more we bear the better able we should be to bear still more; what tries our patience should improve it. The more we are inured to trouble the less we should be surprised at it, and not think it strange. Marvel not that enemies

are injurious, when even friends are unkind; nor that friends are unkind, when even children are undutiful. 4. He comforts himself with hopes that God would, in some way or other, bring good to him out of his affliction, would balance the trouble itself, and recompense his patience under it: "*The Lord will requite me good for his cursing*. If God bid Shimei grieve me, it is that he himself may the more sensibly comfort me; surely he has mercy in store for me, which he is preparing me for by this trial." We may depend upon God as our pay-master, not only for our services, but for our sufferings. *Let them curse, but bless thou*. David, at length, is housed at Bahurim (v. 14), where he meets with refreshment, and is hidden from this strife of tongues.

15 And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. 16 And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. 17 And Absalom said to Hushai, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend?* 18 And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. 19 And again, whom should I serve? *should I not serve* in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence. 20 Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. 21 And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that *are* with thee be strong. 22 So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. 23 And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, *was* as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so *was* all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

Absalom had notice sent him speedily by some of his friends at Jerusalem that David had withdrawn, and with what a small re-

tinue he had gone; so that the coasts were clear, Absalom might take possession of Jerusalem when he pleased. The gates were open, and there was none to oppose him. Accordingly he came without delay (v. 15), extremely elevated, no doubt, with this success at first, and that that in which, when he formed his design, he probably apprehended the greatest difficulty, was so easily and effectually done. Now that he is master of Jerusalem he concludes all his own, the country will follow of course. God suffers wicked men to prosper awhile in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful. The most celebrated politicians of that age were Ahithophel and Hushai. The former Absalom brings with him to Jerusalem (v. 15), the other meets him there (v. 16), so that he cannot but think himself sure of success, when he has both these to be his counsellors; on them he relies, and consults not the ark, though he has that with him. But miserable counsellors were they both; for,

I. Hushai would never counsel him to do wisely. He was really his enemy, and designed to betray him, while he pretended to be in his interest; so that Absalom could not have a more dangerous man about him. 1. Hushai complimented him upon his accession to the throne, as if he had been abundantly satisfied in his title, and well pleased that he had come to the possession, v. 16. What arts of dissimulation are those tempted to use who govern themselves by fleshly wisdom! and how happy are those who have not known these depths of Satan, but have their conversation in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity! 2. Absalom was surprised to find him for him who was known to be David's intimate friend and confidant. He asks him, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* (v. 17), pleasing himself with this thought, that all would be his, since Hushai was. He doubts not of his sincerity, but easily believes what he wishes to be true, that David's best friends are so in love with himself as to take the first opportunity to declare for him, *though the pride of his heart deceived him*, Obad. 3. 3. Hushai confirmed him in the belief that he was hearty for him. For, though David is his friend, yet he is for the king in possession, v. 18. Whom the people choose, and Providence smiles upon, he will be faithful to; and he is for the king in succession (v. 19), the rising sun. It was true, he loved his father; but he had had his day, and it was over; and why should he not love his successor as well? Thus he pretended to give reasons for a resolution he abhorred the thought of.

II. Ahithophel counselled him to do wickedly, and so did as effectually betray him as he did who was designedly false to him; for those that advise men to sin certainly advise them to their hurt; and that government which is founded in sin is founded in the sand.

1. It seems, Ahithophel was noted as a deep politician; his counsel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God, v. 23. Such reputation was he in for subtlety and sagacity in public affairs, such reaches had he beyond other privy-counsellors, such reasons would he give for his advice, and such success generally his projects had, that all people, good and bad, both David and Absalom, had a profound regard for his sentiments, too much by far, when they regarded him *as an oracle of God*; shall the prudence of any mortal compare with him who only is wise? Let us observe from this account of Ahithophel's fame for policy, (1.) That many excel in worldly wisdom who are utterly destitute of heavenly grace, because those who set up for oracles themselves are apt to despise the oracles of God. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*; and the greatest statesmen are seldom the greatest saints. (2.) That frequently the greatest politicians act most foolishly for themselves. Ahithophel was cried up for an oracle, and yet very unwisely took part with Absalom, who was not only a usurper, but a rash youth, never likely to come to good, whose fall, and the fall of all that adhered to him, any one, with the tenth part of the policy that Ahithophel pretended to, might foresee. Well, after all, honesty is the best policy, and will be found so in the long run. But,

2. His policy in this case defeated its own aim. Observe,

(1.) The wicked counsel Ahithophel gave to Absalom. Finding that David had left his concubines to keep the house, he advised him to *lie with them* (v. 21), a very wicked thing. The divine law had made it a capital crime, Lev. xx. 11. The apostle speaks of it as a piece of villainy *not so much as named among the Gentiles*, 1 Cor. v. 1. Reuben lost his birthright for it. But Ahithophel advised Absalom to it as a politic thing, because it would give assurance to all Israel, [1.] That he was in good earnest in his pretensions. No doubt he resolved to make himself master of all that belonged to his predecessor when he began with his concubines. [2.] That he was resolved never to make peace with his father upon any terms; for by this he would render himself so odious to his father that he would never be reconciled to him, which perhaps the people were jealous of and that they must be sacrificed to the reconciliation. Having drawn the sword, he did, by this provocation, throw away the scabbard, which would strengthen the hands of his party and keep them firmly to him. This was Ahithophel's cursed policy, which bespoke him rather *an oracle of the devil than of God*.

(2.) Absalom's compliance with this counsel. It entirely suited his lewd and wicked mind, and he delayed not to put it in execution, v. 22. When an unnatural rebellion was the opera, what fitter prologue could there be to it than such unnatural lust? Thus

was his wickedness all of a piece, and such as a conscience not quite seared could not entertain the thoughts of without the utmost horror. Nay, the client outdoes what his counsel advises. Ahithophel advised him to do it, that all Israel might hear of it; but, as if that were not enough, so perfectly lost is he to all honour and virtue that he will do it, and all Israel shall see it. A tent is accordingly spread on the top of the house for the purpose; so impudently does he declare his sin as Sodom. Yet, in this, the word of God was fulfilled in the letter of it: God had threatened, by Nathan, that, for defiling Bath-sheba, David should have his own wives publicly debauched (*ch. xii. 11, 12*), and some think that Ahithophel, in advising it, designed to be revenged on David for the injury done to Bath-sheba, who was his grand-daughter: for she was the daughter of Eliam (*ch. xi. 3*), who was the son of Ahithophel, *ch. xxiii. 34*. Job speaks of this as the just punishment of adultery (*Let my wife grind to another, Job xxxi. 9, 10*), and the prophet, Hos. iv. 13, 14. What to think of these concubines, who submitted to this wickedness, I know not; but, how unrighteous soever Absalom and they were, we must say, *The Lord is righteous*: nor shall any word of his fall to the ground.

## CHAP. XVII.

The contest between David and Absalom is now hastening towards a crisis. It must be determined by the sword, and preparation is made accordingly in this chapter. 1. Absalom calls a council of war, in which Ahithophel urges despatch (*ver. 1-4*), but Hushai recommends deliberation (*ver. 5-13*); and Hushai's counsel is agreed to (*ver. 14*), for vexation at which Ahithophel hangs himself, *ver. 23*. 2. Secret intelligence is sent to David (but with much difficulty) of their proceedings, *ver. 15-21*. 3. David marches to the other side Jordan (*ver. 22-24*), and there his camp is victualled by some of his friends in that country, *ver. 27-29*. 4. Absalom and his forces march after him into the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, *ver. 25, 26*. There we shall, in the next chapter, find the cause decided by a battle: hitherto, every thing has looked black upon poor David, but now the day of his deliverance begins to dawn.

**M**OREOVER Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: 2 And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: 3 And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace. 4 And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel. 5 Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith. 6 And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we

do *after* his saying? if not; speak thou. 7 And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. 8 For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. 9 Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some *other* place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. 10 And he also *that is* valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. 11 Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person. 12 So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. 13 Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there. 14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

Absalom is now in peaceable possession of Jerusalem; the palace-royal is his own, as are the thrones of judgment, even the thrones of the house of David. His good father reigned in Hebron, and only over the tribe of Judah, above seven years, and was not hasty to destroy his rival; his government was built upon a divine promise, the performance of which he was sure of in due time, and therefore he waited patiently in the mean time. But the young man, Absalom, not only

nastens from Hebron to Jerusalem, but is impatient there till he has destroyed his father, cannot be content with his throne till he has his life; for his government is founded in iniquity, and therefore feels itself tottering and thinks itself obliged to do every thing with violence. That so profligate a wretch as Absalom should aim at the life of so good a father is not so strange (there are here and there monsters in nature); but that the body of the people of Israel, to whom David had been so great a blessing in all respects, should join with him in his attempt, is very amazing. But their fathers often mutinied against Moses. The best of parents, and the best of princes, will not think it strange if they be made uneasy by those who should be their support and joy, when they consider what sons and what subjects David himself had.

David and all that adhered to him must be cut off. This was resolved, for aught that appears, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*. None durst mention his personal merits, and the great services done to his country, in opposition to this resolve, nor so much as ask, "*Why, what evil has he done to forfeit his crown, much less his head?*" None durst propose that his banishment should suffice, for the present, nor that agents should be sent to treat with him to resign the crown, which, having so tamely quitted the city, they might think he would easily be persuaded to do. It was not long since that Absalom himself fled for a crime, and David contented himself with his being an exile, though he deserved death, nay, he mourned and longed for him; but so perfectly void of all natural affection is this ungrateful Absalom that he eagerly thirsts after his own father's blood. It is past dispute that David must be destroyed; all the question is how he may be destroyed.

I. Ahithophel advises that he be pursued immediately, this very night, with a flying army (which he himself undertakes the command of), that the king only be smitten and his forces dispersed, and then the people that were now for him would fall in with Absalom of course, and there would not be such a long war as had been between the house of Saul and David: *The man whom thou seekest is as if all returned*, v. 1—3. By this it appears that Absalom had declared his design to be upon David's life, and Ahithophel concurs with him in it. *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, and be an easy prey to the wolf. Thus he contrives to include the war in a little compass, by fighting neither with small nor great but the king of Israel only, and to conclude it in a little time, by falling upon him immediately. Nothing could be more fatal to David than the taking of these measures. It was too true that he was weary and weak-handed, that a little thing would make him afraid, else he would not have fled from his house upon the first alarm of Absalom's rebellion;

it was probable enough that upon a fierce attack, especially in the night, the small force he had would be put into confusion and disorder, and it would be an easy thing to *smite the king only*, and then the business would be done, the whole nation would be reduced, of course, and *all the people*, says he, *shall be in peace*. See how a general ruin is called by usurpers a *general peace*; but thus the devil's palace is in peace, while he, as a strong man armed, keeps it. Compare with this the plot of Caiaphas (that second Ahithophel) against the Son of David, to crush his interest by destroying him. Let that one man die for the people, John xi. 50. *Kill the heir, and the inheritance shall be ours*, Matt. xxi. 38. But the counsel of them both was turned into foolishness. Yet the children of light may, in their generation, learn wisdom from the children of this world. What our hand finds to do let us do quickly, and with all our might. It is prudence to be vigorous and expeditious, and not to lose time, particularly in our spiritual warfare. If Satan flee from us, let us follow our blow. Those that have quarrelled with crowned heads have generally observed the decorum of declaring only against their evil counsellors, and calling them to an account (*The king himself can do no wrong*, it is they that do it); but Absalom's bare-faced villany strikes at the king directly, nay, at the king only; for (would you think it?) this saying, *I will smite the king only*, pleased Absalom well (v. 4), nor had he so much sense of honour and virtue left him as to pretend to startle at it or even to be reluctant in this barbarous and monstrous resolution. What good can stand before the heat of a furious ambition?

II. Hushai advises that they be not too hasty in pursuing David, but take time to draw up all their force against him, and to overpower him with numbers, as Ahithophel had advised to take him by surprise. Now Hushai, in giving this counsel, really intended to serve David and his interest, that he might have time to send him notice of his proceedings, and that David might gain time to gather an army and to remove into those countries beyond Jordan, in which, lying more remote, Absalom had probably least interest. Nothing would be of greater advantage to David in this juncture than time to turn himself in; that he may have this, Hushai counsels Absalom to do nothing rashly, but to proceed with caution and secure his success by securing his strength. Now,

1. Absalom gave Hushai a fair invitation to advise him. All the elders of Israel approved of Ahithophel's counsel, yet God overruled the heart of Absalom not to proceed upon it, till he had consulted Hushai (v. 5): *Let us hear what he saith*. Herein he thought he did wisely (two heads are better than one), but God taketh the wise in their own craftiness. See Mr. Poole's note on this.

2. Hushai gave very plausible reasons for what he said.

(1.) He argued against Ahithophel's counsel, and undertook to show the danger of following his advice. It is with modesty, and all possible deference to Ahithophel's settled reputation, that he begs leave to differ from him, v. 7. He acknowledges that the counsel of Ahithophel is usually the best, and such as may be relied on; but, with submission to that noble peer, he is of opinion that his counsel is not good at this time, and that it is by no means safe to venture so great a cause as that in which they are now engaged upon so small a number, and such a hasty sally, as Ahithophel advises, remembering the defeat of Israel before A', Josh. vii. 4. It has often proved of bad consequence to despise an enemy. See how plausibly Hushai reasoned. [1.] He insisted much upon it that David was a great soldier, a man of great conduct, courage, and experience; all knew and owned this, even Absalom himself: "*Thy father is a man of war* (v. 8), *a mighty man* (v. 10), and not so weary and weak-handed as Ahithophel imagines. His retiring from Jerusalem must be imputed, not to his cowardice, but his prudence." [2.] His attendants, though few, were mighty men (v. 8), valiant men (v. 10), men of celebrated bravery and versed in all the arts of war. Ahithophel, who perhaps had worn the gown more than the sword, would find himself an unequal match for them. *One of them would chase a thousand.* [3.] They were all exasperated against Absalom, who was the author of all this mischief, were chafed in their minds, and would fight with the utmost fury; so that, what with their courage, and what with their rage, there would be no standing before them, especially for such raw soldiers as Absalom's generally were. Thus did he represent them as formidable as Ahithophel had made them despicable. [4.] He suggested that probably David and some of his men would lie in ambush, in some pit, or other close place, and fall upon Absalom's soldiers before they were aware, the terror of which would put them to flight; and the defeat, though but of a small party, would dispirit all the rest, especially their own consciences at the same time accusing them of treason against one that, they were sure, was not only God's anointed, *but a man after his own heart*, v. 9. "It will soon be given out that there is a slaughter among Absalom's men, and then they will all make the best of their way, and the heart of Ahithophel himself, though now it seems like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt. In short, he will not find it so easy a matter to deal with David and his men as he thinks it is; and, if he be foiled, we shall all be routed."

(2.) He offered his own advice, and gave his reasons; and, [1.] He counselled, that which he knew would gratify Absalom's

proud vain-glorious humour, though it would not be really serviceable to his interest. *First*, He advised that all Israel should be gathered together, that is, the militia of all the tribes. His taking it for granted that they are all for him, and giving him an opportunity to see them all together under his command, would gratify him as much as any thing. *Secondly*, He advises that Absalom go to battle in his own person, as if he looked upon him to be a better soldier than Ahithophel, more fit to give command and have the honour of the victory, insinuating that Ahithophel had put a slight upon him in offering to go without him. See how easy it is to betray proud men, by applauding them, and feeding their pride. [2.] He counselled that which seemed to secure the success, at last, infallibly, without running any hazard. For, if they could raise such vast numbers as they promised themselves, wherever they found David they could not fail to crush him. *First*, If in the field, they should fall upon him, as the dew that covers the face of the ground, and cut off all his men with him, v. 12. Perhaps Absalom was better pleased with the design of cutting off all the men that were with him, having a particular antipathy to some of David's friends, than with Ahithophel's project of smiting the king only. Thus Hushai gained his point by humouring his revenge, as well as his pride. *Secondly*, If in a city, they need not fear conquering him, for they should have hands enough, if occasion were, to draw the city itself into its river with ropes, v. 13. This strange suggestion, how impracticable soever, being new, served for an amusement, and recommended itself by pleasing the fancy, for they would all smile at the humour of it.

(3.) By all these arts, Hushai gained not only Absalom's approbation of his advice, but the unanimous concurrence of this great council of war; they all agreed that the counsel of Hushai was better than the counsel of Ahithophel, v. 14. See here, [1.] How much the policy of man can do: if Hushai had not been there, Ahithophel's counsel would certainly have prevailed; and, though all had given their opinion, nothing could be really more for Absalom's interest than that which he advised; yet Hushai, with his management, brings them all over to his side, and none of them are aware that he says all this in favour of David and his interest, but all say as he says. See how the unthinking are imposed upon by the designing part of mankind; what tools, what fools, great men make of one another by their intrigues; and what tricks there are often in courts and councils, which those are happiest that are least conversant with. [2.] See how much more the providence of God can do. Hushai managed the plot with dexterity, yet the success is ascribed to God, and his agency on the minds of those concerned: *The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of*

Ahithophel. Be it observed, to the comfort of all that fear God, he turns all men's hearts as the rivers of water, though *they know not the thoughts of the Lord*. He stands in the congregation of the mighty, has an overruling hand in all counsels and a negative voice in all resolves, and laughs at men's projects against his anointed.

15 Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel: and thus and thus have I counselled. 16 Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that *are* with him. 17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by En-rogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them; and they went and told king David. 18 Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down. 19 And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known. 20 And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find *them*, they returned to Jerusalem. 21 And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you.

We must now leave David's enemies pleasing themselves with the thoughts of a sure victory by following Hushai's counsel, and sending a summons, no doubt, to all the tribes of Israel, to come to the general rendezvous at a place appointed, pursuant to that counsel: and we next find David's friends consulting how to get him notice of all this, that he might steer his course accordingly. Hushai tells the priests what had passed in council, r. 15. But, it should seem, he was not sure but that yet Ahithophel's

counsel might be followed, and was therefore jealous lest, if he made not the best of his way, the king would be *swallowed up, and all the people that were with him*, v. 16. Perhaps, as he was called in to give his advice (v. 5), so he was dismissed before they came to that resolve (r. 14) in favour of his advice, or he feared they might afterwards change their mind. However, it was good to provide against the worst, and therefore to hasten those valuable lives out of the reach of these destroyers. Such strict guards did Absalom set upon all the avenues to Jerusalem that they had much ado to get this necessary intelligence to David. 1. The young priests that were to be the messengers were forced to retire secretly out of the city, by *En-rogel*, which signifies, as some say, *the fountain of a spy*. Surely it went ill with Jerusalem when two such faithful priests as they were might not be seen to come into the city. 2. Instructions were sent to them by a poor simple young woman, who probably went to that well under pretence of fetching water, v. 17. If she carried the message by word of mouth, there was danger of her making some mistake or blunder in it; but Providence can make an ignorant girl a trusty messenger, and serve its wise counsels by the foolish things of the world. 3. Yet, by the vigilance of Absalom's spies, they were discovered, and information was brought to Absalom of their motions: *A lad saw them and told him*, r. 18. 4. They, being aware that they were discovered, sheltered themselves in a friend's house in Bahurim, where David had refreshed himself but just before, *ch. xvi. 14*. There they were happily hidden in a well, which now, in summer time, perhaps was dry, v. 18. The woman of the house very ingeniously covered the mouth of the well with a cloth, on which she spread corn to dry, so that the pursuers were not aware that there was a well; else they would have searched it, v. 19. Thus far the woman did well; but we know not how to justify her further concealing them with a lie, r. 20. We must not do evil that good may come of it. However, hereby the messengers were protected, and the pursuers were defeated and returned to Absalom without their prey. It was well that Absalom did not hereupon fall upon their two fathers, Zadok and Abiathar, as Saul on Ahimelech for his kindness to David: but God restrained him. Being thus preserved, they brought their intelligence very faithfully to David (v. 21), with this advice of his friends, that he should not delay to pass over Jordan, near to which, it seems, he now was. There, as some think, he penned the 42d and 43d Psalms, looking back upon *Jerusalem from the land of Jordan*, Ps. xlii. 6.

22 Then David arose, and all the people that *were* with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that



was not gone over Jordan. 23 And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled *his* ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father. 24 Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. 25 And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa *was* a man's son, whose name *was* Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother. 26 So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead. 27 And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, 28 Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched *corn*, and beans, and lentiles, and parched *pulse*, 29 And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that *were* with him, to eat: for they said, The people *is* hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

Here is, I. The transporting of David and his forces over Jordan, pursuant to the advice he had received from his friends at Jerusalem, *v.* 22. He, and all that were with him, went over in the night, whether in ferry-boats, which probably always plied there, or through the fords, does not appear. But special notice is taken of this, that there lacked not one of them: none deserted him, though his distress was great, none staid behind sick or weary, nor were any lost or cast away in passing the river. Herein some make him a type of the Messiah, who said, in a difficult day, *Of all that thou hast given me have I lost none.* Having got over Jordan, he marched many miles forward to Mahanaim, a Levites' city in the tribe of Gad, in the utmost border of that tribe, and not far from Rabbah, the chief city of the Ammonites. This city, which Ishbosheth had made his royal city (*ch.* ii. 8), David now made his head-quarters, *v.* 24. And now he had time to raise an army wherewith to oppose the rebels and give them a warm reception.

11. The death of Ahithophel, *r.* 23. He died by his own hands, *felo de se—a suicide.* He hanged himself for vexation that his counsel was not followed; for thereby, 1 He thought himself slighted, and an intolerable slur cast upon his reputation for wisdom. His judgment always used to sway at the council-board, but now another's opinion is thought wiser and better than his. His proud heart cannot bear the affront; it rises and swells, and the more he thinks of it the more violent his resentments grow, till they bring him at last to this desperate resolve, not to live to see another preferred before him. All men think him a wise man, but he thinks himself the only wise man; and therefore, to be avenged upon mankind for not thinking so too, he will die, that wisdom may die with him. The world is not worthy of such an oracle as he is, and therefore he will make them know the want of him. See what real enemies those are to themselves that think too well of themselves, and what mischiefs those run upon that are impatient of contempt. That will break a proud man's heart that will not break a humble man's sleep. 2. He thought himself endangered and his life exposed. He concluded that, because his counsel was not followed, Absalom's cause would certainly miscarry, and then, whoever would find David's mercy, he concluded that he, who was the greatest criminal, and had particularly advised him to lie with his father's concubines, must be sacrificed to his justice. To prevent therefore the shame and terror of a public and solemn execution, he does justice upon himself, and, after all his reputation for wisdom, by this his last act puts a far greater disgrace upon himself than Absalom's privy-council had put upon him, and answers his name *Ahithophel*, which signifies, *the brother of a fool.* Nothing indicates so much folly as self-murder. Observe, How deliberately he did it, and of malice prepense against himself; not in a heat, but he went home to his city, to his house, to do it; and, which is strange, took time to consider of it, and yet did it. And, to prove himself *compos mentis—in his senses*, when he did it, he first put his household in order, made his will as a man of sane memory and understanding, settled his estate, balanced his accounts; yet he that had sense and prudence enough to do this had not consideration enough to revoke the sentence his pride and passion had passed upon his own neck, nor so much as to suspend the execution of it till he saw the event of Absalom's rebellion. Now herein we may see, (1.) Contempt poured upon the wisdom of man. He that was more renowned for policy than any man played the fool with himself more abundantly. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, when he sees him that was so great an oracle dying *as a fool dies.* (2.) Honour done to the justice of God. When the wicked are thus *snares in the work of their own hands*,

and sunk in a pit of their own digging, the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth, and we must say, *Higgoion, Selah*; it is a thing to be marked and meditated upon, Ps. vii. 15, 16. (3.) Prayer answered, and an honest cause served even by its enemies. Now, as David had prayed, Ahithophel's counsel was turned into foolishness to himself. Dr. Lightfoot supposes that David penned the 55th Psalm upon occasion of Ahithophel's being in the plot against him, and that he is the man complained of (v. 13) that had been *his equal, his guide, and his acquaintance*; and, if so, this was an immediate answer to his prayer there (v. 15): *Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quickly into hell.* Ahithophel's death was an advantage to David's interest; for had he digested that affront (as those must resolve often to do that will live in this world), and continued his post at Absalom's elbow, he might have given him counsel afterwards that might have been of pernicious consequence to David. It is well that that breath is stopped and that head laid from which nothing could be expected but mischief. It seems, it was not then usual to disgrace the dead bodies of self-murderers, for Ahithophel was buried, we may suppose honourably buried, in the sepulchre of his father, though he deserved no better than the burial of an ass. See Eccl. viii. 10.

III. Absalom's pursuit of his father. He had now got all the men of Israel with him, as Hushai advised, and he himself, at the head of them, passed over Jordan, v. 24. Not content that he had driven his good father to the utmost corner of his kingdom, he resolved to chase him out of the world. He pitched in the land of Gilead with all his forces, ready to give David battle, v. 26. Absalom made one Amasa his general (v. 25), whose father was by birth Jether, an Ishmaelite (1 Chron. ii. 17), but by religion Ithra (as he is here called), an Israelite; probably he was not only proselyted, but, having married a near relation of David's, was, by some act of the state, naturalized, and is therefore called an Israelite. His wife, Amasa's mother, was Abigail, David's sister, whose other sister, Zeruiah, was Joab's mother (1 Chron. ii. 16), so that Amasa was in the same relation to David that Joab was. In honour to his family, even while he was in arms against his father, Absalom made him commander-in-chief of all his forces. Jesse is here called *Nahash*, for many had two names; or perhaps this was his wife's name.

IV. The friends David met with in this distant country. Even Shobi, a younger brother of the royal family of the Ammonites, was kind to him, v. 27. It is probable that he had detested the indignity which his brother Hanun had done to David's ambassadors, and for that had received favours from David, which he now returned. Those that think their prosperity most confirmed know not

but, some time or other, they may stand in need of the kindness of those that now lie at their mercy, and may be glad to be beholden to them, which is a reason why we should, as we have opportunity, *do good to all men, for he that watereth shall be watered also himself*, when there is occasion. Machir, the son of Ammiel, was he that maintained Me-phibosheth (ch. ix. 4), till David eased him of that charge, and is now repaid for it by that generous man, who, it seems, was the common patron of distressed princes. Barzillai we shall hear of again. These, compassionating David and his men, now that they were weary with a long march, brought him furniture for his house, *beds and basins*, and provision for his table, *wheat and barley, &c.*, v. 28, 29. He did not put them under contribution, did not compel them to supply him, much less plunder them; but in token of their dutiful affection to him, their firm adherence to his government, and their sincere concern for him in his present straits, of their own good will they brought in plenty of all that which he had occasion for. Let us learn hence to be generous and open-handed, according as our ability is, to all in distress, especially great men, to whom it is most grievous, and good men, who deserve better treatment; and see how God sometimes makes up to his people that comfort from strangers which they are disappointed of in their own families.

## CHAP. XVIII.

This chapter puts a period to Absalom's rebellion and life, and so makes way for David to his throne again, whither the next chapter brings him back in peace and triumph. We have here, I. David's preparations to engage the rebels, ver. 1-5. II. The total defeat of Absalom's party, and their dispersion, ver. 6-8. III. The death of Absalom, and his burial, ver. 9-18. IV. The bringing of the tidings to David, who tarried at Mahanaim, ver. 19-32. V. His bitter lamentation for Absalom, ver. 33.

AND David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. 2 And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also. 3 But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. 4 And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.

5 And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, *Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.* And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom. 6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; 7 Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand *men.* 8 For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country; and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

Which way David raised an army here, and what reinforcements were sent him, we are not told; many, it is likely, from all the coasts of Israel, at least from the neighbouring tribes, came in to his assistance, so that, by degrees, he was able to make head against Absalom, as Ahithophel foresaw. Now here we have,

I. His army numbered and marshalled, v. 1, 2. He had, no doubt, committed his cause to God by prayer, for that was his relief in all his afflictions; and then he took an account of his forces. Josephus says they were, in all, but about 4000. These he divided into regiments and companies, to each of which he appointed proper officers, and then disposed them, as is usual, into the right wing, the left wing, and the centre, two of which he committed to his two old experienced generals, Joab and Abishai, and the third to his new friend Ittai. Good order and good conduct may sometimes be as serviceable in an army as great numbers. Wisdom teaches us to make the best of the strength we have, and let it reach to the utmost.

II. Himself over-persuaded not to go in person to the battle. He was Absalom's false friend that persuaded him to go, and served his pride more than his prudence; David's true friends would not let him go, remembering what they had been told of Ahithophel's design to *smite the king only.* David showed his affection to them by being willing to venture with them (v. 2), and they showed theirs to him by opposing it. We must never reckon it an affront to be gain-said for our good, and by those that therein consult our interest. 1. They would by no means have him to expose himself, for (say they) *thou art worth 10,000 of us.* Thus ought good princes to be valued by their subjects, who, for their safety, must be willing to expose themselves. 2. They would not so far gratify the enemy, who would rejoice more in his fall than in the defeat of

the whole army. 3. He might be more serviceable to them by tarrying in the city, with a reserve of his forces there, whence he might send them recruits. That may be a post of real service which yet is not a post of danger. The king acquiesced in their reasons, and changed his purpose (v. 4): *What seemeth to you best I will do.* It is no piece of wisdom to be stiff in our resolutions, but to be willing to hear reason, even from our inferiors, and to be overruled by their advice when it appears to be for our own good. Whether the people's prudence had an eye to it or no, God's providence wisely ordered it, that David should not be in the field of battle; for then his tenderness would certainly have interposed to save the life of Absalom, whom God had determined to destroy.

III. The charge he gave concerning Absalom, v. 5. When the army was drawn out, rank and file, Josephus says, he encouraged them, and prayed for them, but withal bade them all take heed of doing Absalom any hurt. How does he render good for evil! Absalom would have David only smitten. David would have Absalom only spared. What foils are these to each other! Never was unnatural hatred to a father more strong than in Absalom; nor was ever natural affection to a child more strong than in David. Each did his utmost, and showed what man is capable of doing, how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say which is more amazing. "*Deal gently,*" says David, "by all means, *with the young man, even with Absalom, for my sake;* he is a young man, rash and heady, and his age must excuse him; he is mine, whom I love; if you love me, be not severe with him." This charge supposes David's strong expectation of success. Having a good cause and a good God, he doubts not but Absalom would lie at their mercy, and therefore bids them deal gently with him, spare his life and reserve him for his judgment.

Bishop Hall thus descants on this: "What means this ill-placed love? This unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor? Of all traitors, with a son? Of all sons, with an Absalom? That graceless darling of so good a father? And all this, for thy sake, whose crown, whose blood, he hunts after? For whose sake must he be pursued, if forborne for thine? Must the cause of the quarrel be the motive of mercy? Even in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence. But was not this done in type of that immeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers, *Father, forgive them? Deal gently with them for my sake.*" When God

sends an affliction to correct his children, it is with this charge, "Deal gently with them for my sake;" for he knows our frame.

IV. A complete victory gained over Absalom's forces. The battle was fought in the wood of Ephraim (v. 6), so called from some memorable action of the Ephraimites there, though it lay in the tribe of Gad. David thought fit to meet the enemy with his forces at some distance, before they came up to Mahanaim, lest he should bring that city into trouble which had so kindly sheltered him. The cause shall be decided by a pitched battle. Josephus represents the fight as very obstinate, but the rebels were at length totally routed and 20,000 of them slain, v. 7. Now they smarted justly for their treason against their lawful prince, their uneasiness under so good a government, and their base ingratitude to so good a governor; and they found what it was to take up arms for a usurper, who with his kisses and caresses had wheedled them into their own ruin. Now where are the rewards, the preferments, the golden days, they promised themselves from him? Now they see what it is to take counsel against the Lord and his anointed, and to think of breaking his hands asunder. And that they might see that God fought against them, 1. They are conquered by a few, an army, in all probability, much inferior to theirs in number. 2. By that flight with which they hoped to save themselves they destroyed themselves. The wood, which they sought to for shelter, devoured more than the sword, that they might see how, when they thought themselves safe from David's men, and said, Surely the bitterness of death is past, yet the justice of God pursued them and suffered them not to live. What refuge can rebels find from divine vengeance? The pits and bogs, the stumps and thickets, and, as the Chaldee paraphrast understands it, the wild beasts of the wood, were probably the death of multitudes of the dispersed distracted Israelites, besides the 20,000 that were slain with the sword. God herein fought for David, and yet fought against him; for all these that were slain were his own subjects, and the common interest of his kingdom was weakened by the slaughter. The Romans allowed no triumph for a victory in a civil war.

9 And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away. 10 And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. 11 And Joab said

unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle. 12 And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. 13 Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me. 14 Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. 15 And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. 16 And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people. 17 And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

Here is Absalom quite at a loss, at his wit's end first, and then at his life's end. He that began the fight, big with the expectation of triumphing over David himself, with whom, if he had had him in his power, he would not have dealt gently, is now in the greatest consternation, when he meets the servants of David, v. 9. Though they were forbidden to meddle with him, he durst not look them in the face; but, finding they were near him, he clapped spurs to his mule and made the best of his way, through thick and thin, and so rode headlong upon his own destruction. Thus he that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare, Jer. xlviii. 44. David is inclined to spare him, but divine

justice passes sentence upon him as a traitor, and sees it executed—that he hang by the neck, be caught alive, be hanged, and his body disposed of disgracefully.

I. He is hanged by the neck. Riding furiously, neck or nothing, *under the thick boughs of a great oak* which hung low and had never been cropped, either the twisted branches, or some one forked bough of the oak, caught hold of his head, either by his neck, or, as some think, by his long hair, which had been so much his pride, and was now justly made a halter for him, and there he hung, so astonished that he could not use his hands to help himself or so entangled that his hands could not help him, but the more he struggled the more he was embarrassed. This set him up for a fair mark to the servants of David, and he had the terror and shame of seeing himself thus exposed, while he could do nothing for his own relief, neither fight nor fly. Observe concerning this, 1. That his *mule went away from under him*, as if glad to get clear of such a burden, and resign it to the ignominious tree. Thus the whole creation groans under the burden of man's corruption, but shall shortly be delivered from its load, Rom. viii. 21, 22. 2. That he hung *between heaven and earth*, as unworthy of either, as abandoned of both; earth would not keep him, heaven would not take him, hell therefore opens her mouth to receive him. 3. That this was a very surprising unusual thing. It was fit that it should be so, his crime being so monstrous: if, in his flight, his mule had thrown him, and left him half-dead upon the ground, till the servants of David had come up and dispatched him, the same thing would have been done as effectually; but that would have been too common a fate for so uncommon a criminal. God will here, as in the case of those other rebels, Dathan and Abiram, *create a new thing*, that it may be understood how much *this man has provoked the Lord*, Num. xvi. 29, 30. Absalom is here hung up, *in terrorem—to frighten* children from disobedience to their parents. See Prov. xxx. 17.

II. He is caught alive by one of the servants of David, who goes directly and tells Joab in what posture he found that arch-rebel, v. 10. Thus was he set up for a spectacle, as well as a mark, that the righteous might see him and *laugh at him* (Ps. lii. 6), while he had this further vexation in his breast, that of all the friends he had courted and confided in, and thought he had sure in his interest, though he hung long enough to have been relieved, yet he had none at hand to disentangle him. Joab chides the man for not dispatching him (v. 11), telling him, if he had given that bold stroke, he would have rewarded him with ten half-crowns and a girdle, that is, a captain's commission, which perhaps was signified by the delivery of a belt or girdle; see Isa. xxii. 21. But

the man, though zealous enough against Absalom, justified himself in not doing it: "Dispatch him!" says he, "not for all the world; it would have cost me my head: and thou thyself wast witness to the king's charge concerning him (v. 12), and, for all thy talk, wouldst have been my prosecutor if I had done it," v. 13. Those that love the treason hate the traitor. Joab could not deny this, nor blame the man for his caution, and therefore makes him no answer, but breaks off the discourse, under colour of haste (v. 14): *I may not tarry thus with thee*. Superiors should consider a reproof before they give it, lest they be ashamed of it afterwards, and find themselves unable to make it good.

III. He is (as I may say) embowelled and quartered, as traitors are, so pitifully mangled is he as he hangs there, and receives his death in such a manner as to see all its terrors and feel all its pain. 1. Joab throws three darts into his body, which put him, no doubt, to exquisite torment, while he is yet *alive in the midst of the oak*, v. 14. I know not whether Joab can be justified in this direct disobedience to the command of his sovereign; was this to *deal gently with the young man*? Would David have suffered him to do it if he had been upon the spot? Yet this may be said for him, that, while he broke the order of a too indulgent father, he did real service both to his king and country, and would have endangered the welfare of both if he had not done it. *Salus populi suprema lex—The safety of the people is the supreme law*. 2. Joab's young men, ten of them, smite him, before he is dispatched, v. 15. They surrounded him, made a ring about him in triumph, and then *smote him and slew him*. So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord! Joab hereupon sounds a retreat, v. 16. The danger is over, now that Absalom is slain; the people will soon return to their allegiance to David, and therefore no more blood shall be spilt; no prisoners are taken, to be tried as traitors and made examples; let every man return to his tent; they are all the king's subjects, all his good subjects again.

IV. His body is disposed of disgracefully (v. 17, 18): They *cast it into a great pit in the wood*; they would not bring it to his father (for that circumstance would but have added to his grief), nor would they preserve it to be buried, according to his order, but threw it into the next pit with indignation. Now where is the beauty he had been so proud of and for which he had been so much admired? Where are his aspiring projects, and the castles he had built in the air? His thoughts perish, and he with them. And, to signify how heavy *his iniquity lay upon his bones*, as the prophet speaks (Ezek. xxxii. 27), they raised a *great heap of stones upon him*, to be a monument of his villany, and to signify that he ought to have been stoned as a rebellious son, Dent. xxi. 21. Travellers

say that the place is taken notice of to this day, and that it is common for passengers to throw a stone to this heap, with words to this purport: *Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom, and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents.* To aggravate the ignominy of Absalom's burial, the historian takes notice of a pillar he had erected in the valley of Kidron, near Jerusalem, to be a monument for himself, and keep his name in remembrance (c. 18), at the foot of which, it is probable, he designed to be buried. What foolish insignificant projects do proud men fill their heads with! And what care do many people take about the disposal of their bodies, when they are dead, that have no care at all what shall become of their precious souls! Absalom had three sons (ch. xiv. 27), but, it seems, now he had none; God had taken them away by death; and justly is a rebellious son written childless. To make up the want, he erects this pillar for a memorial; yet in this also Providence crosses him, and a rude heap of stones shall be his monument, instead of this marble pillar. Thus *those that exalt themselves shall be abased.* His care was to have his name kept in remembrance, and it is so, to his everlasting dishonour. He could not be content in the obscurity of the rest of David's sons, of whom nothing is recorded but their names, but would be famous, and is therefore justly made for ever infamous. The pillar shall bear his name, but not to his credit; it was designed for Absalom's glory, but proved Absalom's folly.

19 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies. 20 And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. 21 Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. 22 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? 23 But howsoever, *said he*, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush. 24 And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over

the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld a man running alone. 25 And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, *there is* tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. 26 And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold *another* man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. 27 And the watchman said, Methinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. 28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. 29 And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and *me* thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what *it was*. 30 And the king said *unto him*, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. 31 And, behold, Cush came; and Cush said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. 32 And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man is. 33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

Absalom's business is done; and we are now told,

I. How David was informed of it. He staid behind at the city of Mahanaim, some miles from the wood where the battle was, and in the utmost border of the land. Absalom's scattered forces all made homeward towards Jordan, which was the contrary way

from Mahanaim, so that his watchmen could not perceive how the battle went, till an express came on purpose to bring advice of the issue, which the king sat in the gate expecting to hear, v. 24.

1. Cushy was the man Joab ordered to carry the tidings (v. 21), an *Ethiopian*, so his name signifies, and some think that he was so by birth, a black that waited on Joab, probably one of the ten that had helped to dispatch Absalom (v. 15) as some think, though it was dangerous for one of those to bring the news to David, lest his fate should be the same with theirs that reported to him Saul's death, and Ish-bosheth's.

2. Ahimaaz, the young priest (one of those who brought David intelligence of Absalom's motions, ch. xvii. 17), was very forward to be the messenger of these tidings, so transported was he with joy that this cloud was blown over; let him go and tell the king that *the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies*, v. 19. This he desired, not so much in hope of a reward (he was above that) as that he might have the pleasure and satisfaction of bringing the king, whom he loved, this good news. Joab knew David better than Ahimaaz did, and that the tidings of Absalom's death, which must conclude the story, would spoil the acceptableness of all the rest; and he loves Ahimaaz too well to let him be the messenger of those tidings (v. 20); they are fitter to be brought by a footman than by a priest. However, when Cushy was gone, Ahimaaz begged hard for leave to run after him, and with great importunity obtained it, v. 22, 23. One would wonder why he should be so very fond of this office, when another was employed in it. (1.) Perhaps it was to show his swiftness; observing how heavily Cushy ran, and that he took the worse way, though the nearest, he had a mind to show how fast he could run, and that he could go the furthest way about and yet beat Cushy. No great praise for a priest to be swift of foot, yet perhaps Ahimaaz was proud of it. (2.) Perhaps it was in prudence and tenderness to the king that he desired it. He knew he could get before Cushy, and therefore was willing to prepare the king, by a vague and general report, for the plain truth which Cushy was ordered to tell him. If had news must come, it is best that it come gradually, and will be the better borne.

3. They are both discovered by the watchman on the gate of Mahanaim, Ahimaaz first (v. 24), for, though Cushy had the lead, Ahimaaz soon outran him; but presently after Cushy appeared, v. 26. (1.) When the king hears of one running alone he concludes he is an express (v. 25): *If he be alone, there are tidings in his mouth*; for if they had been beaten, and were flying back from the enemy, there would have been many. (2.) When he hears it is Ahimaaz he concludes he brings good news, v. 27. Ahimaaz, it seems, was so famous for running that he was known by

it at a distance, and so eminently good that it is taken for granted, if he be the messenger, the news must needs be good: *He is a good man*, zealously affected to the king's interest, and would not bring bad news. It is pity but the good tidings of the gospel should always be brought by good men; and how welcome should the messengers be to us for the irmessage sake!

4. Ahimaaz is very forward to proclaim the victory (v. 28), cries at a distance, "Peace, there is peace;" peace after war, which is doubly welcome. "*All is well*, my lord O king! the danger is over, and we may return, when the king pleases, to Jerusalem." And, when he comes near, he tells him the news more particularly, "They are all cut off *that lifted up their hand against the king*;" and, as became a priest, while he gives the king the joy of it, he gives God the glory of it, the God of peace and war, the God of salvation and victory: "*Blessed be the Lord thy God*, that has done this for thee, as thy God, pursuant to the promises made to uphold thy throne," ch. vii. 16. When he said this, *he fell down upon his face*, not only in reverence to the king, but in humble adoration of God, whose name he praised for this success. By directing David thus to give God thanks for his victory, he prepared him for the approaching news of its allay. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged in thanksgiving to God for our mercies the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience the afflictions mixed with them. Poor David is so much a father that he forgets he is a king, and therefore cannot rejoice in the news of a victory, till he know whether the *young man Absalom be safe*, for whom his heart seems to tremble, almost as Eli's, in a similar case, for the ark of God. Ahimaaz soon discerned, what Joab intimated to him, that the death of the king's son would make the tidings of the day very unwelcome, and therefore in his report left that matter doubtful; and, though he gave occasion to suspect how it was, yet, that the thunderclap might not come too suddenly upon the poor perplexed king, he refers him to the next messenger, whom they saw coming, for a more particular account of it. "When Joab sent the king's servant (namely, *Cushi*) and *me thy servant*, to bring the news, *I saw a great tumult*, occasioned by something extraordinary, as you will hear by and by; but I have nothing to say about it. I have delivered that which was my message. Cushy is better able to inform you than I am. I will not be the messenger of evil tidings; nor will I pretend to know that which I cannot give a perfect account of." He is therefore told to stand by till Cushy come (v. 30), and now, we may suppose, he gives the king a more particular account of the victory, which was the thing he came to bring the news of.

5. Cushy, the slow post, proves the sure one, and besides the confirmation of the

news of the victory which Ahimaaz had brought—*The Lord has avenged thee of all those that rose up against thee* (v. 31)—he satisfied the king's enquiry concerning Absalom, v. 32. *Is he safe?* says David. "Yes," says Cush, "he is safe in his grave;" but he tells the news so discreetly that, how unwelcome soever the message is, the messenger can have no blame. He did not tell him plainly that Absalom was hanged, and run through, and buried under a heap of stones; but only that his fate was what he desired might be the fate of all that were traitors against the king, his crown and dignity: "*The enemies of my lord the king, whoever they are, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is; I need wish them no worse.*"

II. How David received the intelligence. He forgets all the joy of his deliverance, and is quite overwhelmed with the sorrowful tidings of Absalom's death, v. 33. As soon as he perceived by Cush's reply that Absalom was dead, he asked no more questions, but fell into a passion of weeping, retired from company, and abandoned himself to sorrow; as he was going up to his chamber he was overheard to say, "*O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! alas for thee! I lament thee. How hast thou fallen! Would God I had died for thee, and that thou hadst remained alive this day*" (so the Chaldee adds) "*O Absalom! my son, my son!*" I wish I could see reason to think that this arose from a concern about Absalom's everlasting state, and that the reason why he wished he had died for him was because he had good hopes of his own salvation, and of Absalom's repentance if he had lived. It rather seems to have been spoken inconsiderately, and in a passion, and it was his infirmity. He is to be blamed, 1. For showing so great a fondness for a graceless son only because he was handsome and witty, while he was justly abandoned both of God and man. 2. For quarrelling, not only with divine providence, in the disposals of which he ought silently to have acquiesced, but with divine justice, the judgments of which he ought to have adored and subscribed to. See how Bildad argues (Job viii. 3, 4), *If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away in their transgression, thou shouldst submit, for doth God pervert judgment?* See Lev. x. 3. 3. For opposing the justice of the nation, which, as king, he was entrusted with the administration of, and which, with other public interests, he ought to have preferred before any natural affection. 4. For despising the mercy of his deliverance, and the deliverance of his family and kingdom, from Absalom's wicked designs, as if this were no mercy, nor worth giving thanks for, because it cost the life of Absalom. 5. For indulging a strong passion, and speaking unadvisedly with his lips. He now forgot his own reasonings upon the death of another child

(*Can I bring him back again?*) and his own resolution to keep his mouth as with a bridle when his heart was hot within him, as well as his own practice at other times, when he quieted himself as a child that was weaned from his mother. The best men are not always in an equally good frame. What we over-loved we are apt to over-grieve for: in each affection, therefore, it is wisdom to have rule over our own spirits and to keep a strict guard upon ourselves when that is removed from us which was very dear to us. Losers think they may have leave to speak; but little said is soon amended. The penitent patient sufferer *sitteth alone and keepeth silence* (Lam. iii. 28), or rather, with Job, says, *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

## CHAP. XIX.

We left David's army in triumph and yet David himself in tears, now here we have, I. His return to himself, by the persuasion of Joab, ver. 1—3. II. His return to his kingdom from his present banishment. 1. The men of Israel were forward of themselves to bring him back, ver. 9, 10. 2. The men of Judah were dealt with by David's agents to do it (ver. 11—14) and did it, ver. 15 III. At the king's coming over Jordan, Shimei's treason is pardoned (ver. 16—23), Mephiboseth's failure is excused (ver. 24—30), and Barzillai's kindness is thankfully owned, and recompensed to his son, ver. 31—39. IV. The men of Israel quarrelled with the men of Judah, for not calling them to the ceremony of the king's restoration, which occasioned a new rebellion, an account of which we have in the next chapter, ver. 40—43.

AND it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. 2 And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. 3 And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. 4 But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! 5 And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; 6 In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. 7 Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than



all the evil that befel thee from thy youth until now. 8 Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

Soon after the messengers had brought the news of the defeat and death of Absalom to the court of Mahanaim. Joab and his victorious army followed, to grace the king's triumphs and receive his further orders. Now here we are told,

I. What a damp and disappointment it was to them to find the king in tears for Absalom's death, which they construed as a token of his displeasure against them for what they had done, whereas they expected him to have met them with joy and thanks for their good services: *It was told Joab, v. 1.* The report of it ran through the army (*v. 2*), *how the king was grieved for his son.* The people will take particular notice what their princes say and do. The more eyes we have upon us, and the greater our influence is, the more need we have to speak and act wisely and to govern our passions strictly. When they came to the city they found the king in close mourning, *v. 4.* He covered his face, and would not so much as look up, nor take any notice of the generals when they attended him. It could not but surprise them to find, 1. How the king proclaimed his passion, of which he ought to have been ashamed, and which he would have striven to smother and conceal if he had consulted either his reputation for courage, which was lessened by his mean submission to the tyranny of so absurd a passion, or his interest in the people, which would be prejudiced by his discountenancing what was done in zeal for his honour and the public safety. Yet see how he avows his grief: *He cries with a loud voice, O my son Absalom!* "My servants have all come home safe, but where is my son? He is dead; and, dying in sin, I fear he is lost for ever. I cannot now say, *I shall go to him*, for my soul shall not be gathered with such sinners; what shall be done for thee, *O Absalom! my son, my son!*" 2. How he prolonged his passion, even till the army had come up to him, which must be some time after he received the first intelligence. If he had contented himself with giving vent to his passion for an hour or two when he first heard the news, it would have been excusable, but to continue it thus for so bad a son as Absalom, like Jacob for so good a son as Joseph, with a resolution to go to the grave mourning and to stain his triumphs with his tears, was very unwise and very unworthy. Now see how ill this was taken by the people. They were loth to blame the king, for *whatever he did used to please them* (*ch. iii. 36*), but they

took it as a great mortification to them *Their victory was turned into mourning, v. 2. They stole into the city as men ashamed, v. 3.* In compliment to their sovereign, they would not rejoice in that which they perceived so afflictive to him, and yet they could not but be uneasy that they were thus obliged to conceal their joy. Superiors ought not to put such hardships as these on their inferiors.

II. How plainly and vehemently Joab reproofed David for this indiscreet management of himself in this critical juncture. David never more needed the hearts of his subjects than now, nor was ever more concerned to secure his interest in their affections; and therefore whatever tended to disoblige them now was the most impolitic thing he could do, and the greatest wrong imaginable to his friends that adhered to him. Joab therefore censures him, *v. 5-7.* He speaks a great deal of reason, but not with the respect and deference which he owed to his prince. *Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked?* A plain case may be fairly pleaded with those that are above us, and they may be reproofed for what they do amiss, but it must not be done with rudeness and insolence. David did indeed need to be roused and alarmed; and Joab thought it no time to dally with him. If superiors do that which is foolish, they must neither think it strange nor take it ill if their inferiors tell them of it, perhaps too bluntly. 1. Joab magnifies the services of David's soldiers: "*This day they have saved thy life*, and therefore deserve to be taken notice of, and have reason to resent it if they be not." It is implied that Absalom, whom he honoured with his tears, sought his ruin and the ruin of his family, while those whom by his tears he puts a slight upon were such as preserved from ruin him and all that was dear to him. Great mischiefs have arisen to princes from the contempt of great merits. 2. He aggravates the discouragement David had given them: "*Thou hast shamed their faces*; for, while they have shown such a value for thy life, thou hast shown no value for theirs, but preferred a spoiled wicked youth, a false traitor to his king and country, whom we are happily rid of, before all thy wise counsellors, brave commanders, and loyal subjects. What can be more absurd than to love thy enemies and to hate thy friends?" 3. He advises him to present himself immediately at the head of his troops, to smile upon them, welcome them home, congratulate their success, and return them thanks for their services. Even those that may be commanded yet expect to be thanked when they do well, and ought to be. 4. He threatens him with another rebellion if he would not do this, intimating that rather than serve so ungrateful a prince he himself would head a revolt from him, and then (so confident is Joab of his own interest in the people) "*there will not tarry with thee one man.* If I go, they will all go.

Thou hast now nothing to mourn for ; but, if thou persist, I will give thee something to mourn for (as Josephus expresses it) with a true and more bitter mourning."

11. How prudently and mildly David took the reproof and counsel given him, *v.* 8. He shook off his grief, anointed his head, and washed his face, that he might not appear unto men to mourn, and then made his appearance in public in the gate, which was as the guild-hall of the city. Hither the people flocked to him to congratulate his and their safety, and all was well. Note, When we are convinced of a fault, we must amend, though we are told of it by our inferiors, and indecently, or in heat and passion.

9 And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines ; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. 10 And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back ? 11 And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house ? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, *even* to his house. 12 Ye *are* my brethren, ye *are* my bones and my flesh : wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king ? 13 And say ye to Amasa, *Art* thou not of my bone, and of my flesh ? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. 14 And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, *even as the heart of* one man ; so that they sent *this word* unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. 15 So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan.

It is strange that David did not immediately upon the defeat and dispersion of Absalom's forces march with all expedition back to Jerusalem, to regain the possession of his capital city, while the rebels were in confusion and before they could rally again. What occasion was there to bring him back ? Could not he himself go back with the victorious army he had with him in Gilead ? He could, no doubt ; but, 1. He would go

back as a prince, with the consent and unanimous approbation of the people, and not as a conqueror forcing his way : he would restore their liberties, and not take occasion to seize them, or encroach upon them. 2. He would go back in peace and safety, and be sure that he should meet with no difficulty or opposition in his return, and therefore would be satisfied that the people were well-affected to him before he would stir. 3. He would go back in honour, and like himself, and therefore would go back, not at the head of his forces, but in the arms of his subjects ; for the prince that has wisdom and goodness enough to make himself his people's darling, without doubt, looks greater and makes a much better figure than the prince that has strength enough to make himself his people's terror. It is resolved therefore that David must be brought back to Jerusalem his own city, and his own house there, with some ceremony, and here we have that matter concerted.

1. The men of Israel (that is, the ten tribes) were the first that talked of it, *v.* 9, 10. The people were at strife about it ; it was the great subject of discourse and dispute throughout all the country. Some perhaps opposed it : " Let him either come back himself or stay where he is ;" others appeared zealous for it, and reasoned as follows here, to further the design. 1. That David had formerly helped them, had fought their battles, subdued their enemies, and done them much service, and therefore it was a shame that he should continue banished from their country who had been so great a benefactor to it. Note, Good services done to the public, though they may be forgotten for a while, yet will be remembered again when men come to their right minds. 2. That Absalom had now disappointed them. " We were foolishly sick of the cedar, and chose the branch to reign over us ; but we have had enough of him : he is consumed, and we narrowly escaped being consumed with him. Let us therefore return to our allegiance, and think of bringing the king back." Perhaps this was all the strife among them, not a dispute whether the king should be brought back or no (all agreed it was to be done), but whose fault it was that it was not done. As is usual in such cases, every one justified himself and blamed his neighbour. The people laid the fault on the elders, and the elders on the people, and one tribe upon another. Mutual excitements to the doing of a good work are laudable, but not mutual accusations for the not doing of it ; for usually when public services are neglected all sides must share in the blame ; every one might do more than he does, in the reformation of manners, the healing of divisions, and the like.

11. The men of Judah, by David's contrivance, were the first that did it. It is strange that they, being David's own tribe, were not so forward as the rest. David had

intelligence of the good disposition of all the rest towards him, but nothing from Judah, though he had always been particularly careful of them. But we do not always find the most kindness from those from whom we have most reason to expect it. Yet David would not return till he knew the sense of his own tribe. *Judah was his lawgiver*, Ps. lx. 7. That his way home might be the more clear, 1. He employed Zadok and Abiathar, the two chief priests, to treat with the elders of Judah, and to excite them to give the king an invitation back to his house, even to his house, which was the glory of their tribe, v. 11, 12. No men more proper to negotiate this affair than the two priests, who were firm to David's interest, were prudent men, and had great influence with the people. Perhaps the men of Judah were remiss and careless, and did it not, because nobody put them on to do it, and then it was proper to stir them up to it. Many will follow in a good work who will not lead: it is a pity that they should continue idle for want of being spoken to. Or perhaps they were so sensible of the greatness of the provocation they had given to David, by joining with Absalom, that they were afraid to bring him back, despairing of his favour; he therefore warrants his agents to assure them of it, with this reason: "*You are my brethren, my bone and my flesh*, and therefore I cannot be severe with you." The Son of David has been pleased to call us *brethren, his bone and his flesh*, which encourages us to hope that we shall find favour with him. Or perhaps they were willing to see what the rest of the tribes would do before they stirred, with which they are here upbraided: "The speech of all Israel has come to the king to invite him back, and shall Judah be the last, that should have been the first? Where is now the celebrated bravery of that royal tribe? Where is its loyalty?" Note, We should be stirred up to that which is great and good by the examples both of our ancestors and of our neighbours, and by the consideration of our rank. Let not the first in dignity be last in duty. 2. He particularly courted into his interest Amasa, who had been Absalom's general, but was his own nephew as well as Joab, v. 13. He owns him for his kinsman, and promises him that, if he will appear for him now, he will make him captain-general of all his forces in the room of Joab, will not only pardon him (which, it may be, Amasa questioned), but prefer him. Sometimes there is nothing lost in purchasing the friendship of one that has been an enemy. Amasa's interest might do David good service at this juncture. But, if David did wisely for himself in designating Amasa for this post (Joab having now grown intolerably haughty), he did not do kindly by Amasa in letting his design be known, for it occasioned his death by Joab's hand, *ch. xx. 10*. 3. The point was hereby gained. He bowed the heart of

the men of Judah to pass a vote, *nenime contradicente—unanimously*, for the recal of the king, v. 14. God's providence, by the priests' persuasions and Amasa's interest, brought them to this resolve. David stirred not till he received this invitation, and then he came as far back as Jordan, at which river they were to meet him, v. 15. Our Lord Jesus will rule in those that invite him to the throne in their hearts and not till he be invited. He first bows the heart and makes it willing in the day of his power, and then *rules in the midst of his enemies*, Ps. cx. 2, 3.

16 And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hastened and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. 17 And *there were* a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. 18 And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; 19 And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. 20 For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king. 21 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed? 22 And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I *am* this day king over Israel? 23 Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.

Perhaps Jordan was never passed with so much solemnity, nor with so many remarkable occurrences, as it was now, since Israel passed it under Joshua. David, in his afflictive light, remembered God particularly *from the land of Jordan* (Ps. xlii. 6), and now that

land, more than any other, was graced with the glories of his return. David's soldiers furnished themselves with accommodations for their passage over this river, but, for his own family, a *ferry-boat* was sent on purpose, v. 18. A *fleet of boats*, say some; a *bridge of boats* was made, say others; the best convenience they had to serve him with. Two remarkable persons met him on the banks of Jordan, both of whom had abused him wretchedly when he was in his flight.

I. Ziba, who had abused him with his fair tongue, and, by accusing his master, had obtained from the king a grant of his estate, *ch. xvi. 4*. A greater abuse he could not have done him, than, by imposing upon his credulity, to draw him in to do a thing so unkind to the son of his friend Jonathan. He comes now, with a retinue of sons and servants, to meet the king (v. 17), that he may obtain the king's favour, and so come off the better when Mephibosheth shall shortly deceive him, and clear himself, v. 26.

II. Shimei, who had abused him with his foul tongue, railed at him, and cursed him, *ch. xvi. 5*. If David had been defeated, no doubt he would have continued to trample upon him, and have gloried in what he had done; but now that he sees him coming home in triumph, and returning to his throne, he thinks it his interest to make his peace with him. Those who now slight and abuse the Son of David would be glad to make their peace too when he shall come in his glory; but it will be too late. Shimei, to recommend himself to the king, 1. Came with good company, with the men of Judah, as one in their interest. 2. He brought a regiment of the men of Benjamin with him, 1000, of which perhaps he was chiliarch, or commander-in-chief, offering his own and their service to the king; or perhaps they were volunteers, whom by his interest he had got together to meet the king, which was the more obliging because of all the tribes of Israel there were none, except these and Judah, that appeared to pay him this respect. 3. What he did he hastened to do; he lost no time. *Agree with thy adversary quickly, while thou art in the way*. Here is, (1.) The criminal's submission (v. 18—20): *He fell down before the king*, as a penitent, as a supplicant; and, that he might be thought sincere, he did it publicly before all David's servants, and his friends the men of Judah, yea, and before his own thousand. The offence was public, therefore the submission ought to be so. He owns his crime: *Thy servant doth know that I have sinned*. He aggravates it: *I did perversely*. He begs the king's pardon: *Let not the king impute iniquity to thy servant*, that is, deal with me as I deserve. He intimates that it was below the king's great and generous mind to take it to his heart; and pleads his early return to his allegiance, that he was the first of all the house of Joseph (that is, of Israel, who in

the beginning of David's reign had distinguished themselves from Judah by their adherence to Ishbosheth, *ch. ii. 10*) that came to meet the king. He came first, that by his example of duty the rest might be induced, and by his experience of the king's clemency the rest might be encouraged, to follow. (2.) A motion made for judgment against him (v. 21): *Shall not Shimei be put to death as a traitor?* Let him, of all men, be made an example." This motion was made by Abishai, who would have ventured his life to have been the death of Shimei when he was cursing, *ch. xvi. 9*. David did not think fit to have it done then, because his judicial power was cut short; but, now that it was restored, why should not the law have its course? Abishai herein consulted what he supposed to be David's feelings more than his true interest. Princes have need to arm themselves against temptations to severity. (3.) His discharge by the king's order, v. 22, 23. He rejected Abishai's motion with displeasure: *What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?* The less we have to do with those who are of an angry revengeful spirit, and who put us upon doing what is harsh and rigorous, the better. He looks upon these prosecutors as adversaries to him, though they pretended friendship and zeal for his honour. Those who advise us to what is wrong are really *Satans*, adversaries to us. [1.] They were adversaries to his inclination, which was to clemency. He knew that he was *this day king in Israel*, restored to, and re-established in, his kingdom, and therefore his honour inclined him to forgive. It is the glory of kings to forgive those that humble and surrender themselves: *Satis est prostrasse leoni—It suffices the lion that he has laid his victim prostrate*. His joy inclined him to forgive. The pleasantness of his spirit on this great occasion forbade the entrance of any thing that was sour and peevish: joyful days should be forgiving days. Yet this was not all: his experience of God's mercy in restoring him to his kingdom, his exclusion from which he attributed to his sin, inclined him to show mercy to Shimei. Those that are forgiven must forgive. David had severely revenged the abuses done to his ambassadors by the Ammonites (*ch. xii. 31*), but easily passes by the abuse done to himself by an Israelite. That was an affront to Israel in general, and touched the honour of his crown and kingdom; this was purely personal, and therefore (according to the usual disposition of good men) he could the more easily forgive it. [2.] They were adversaries to his interest. If he should put to death Shimei, who cursed him, those would expect the same fate who had taken up arms and actually levied war against him, which would drive them from him, while he was endeavouring to draw them to him. Acts of severity are seldom acts of policy. *The throne is established by mercy*. Shimei,

hereupon, had his pardon signed and sealed with an oath, yet being bound, no doubt, to his good behaviour, and liable to be prosecuted if he afterwards misbehaved; and thus he was reserved to be, in due time, as much a monument of the justice of the government as he was now of its clemency, and in both of its prudence.

24 And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came *again* in peace. 25 And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? 26 And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant *is* lame. 27 And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king *is* as an angel of God: do therefore *what is* good in thine eyes. 28 For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? 29 And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. 30 And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.

The day of David's return was a day of bringing to remembrance, a day of account, in which what had passed in his flight was called over again; among other things, after the case of Shimei, that of Mephibosheth comes to be enquired into, and he himself brings it on.

I. He went down in the crowd to *meet the king* (v. 24), and, as a proof of the sincerity of his joy in the king's return, we are here told what a true mourner he was for the king's banishment. During that melancholy time, when one of the greatest glories of Israel had departed, Mephibosheth continued in a very melancholy state. He was never trimmed, nor put on clean linen, but wholly neglected himself, as one abandoned to grief for the king's affliction and the kingdom's misery. In times of public calamity we

ought to abridge our enjoyments in the delights of sense, in conformity to the season. There are times when God calls to weeping and mourning, and we must comply with the call.

II. When the king came to Jerusalem (since he could not sooner have an opportunity) he made his appearance before him (v. 25); and when the king asked him why he, being one of his family, had staid behind, and not accompanied him in his exile, he opened his case fully to the king. 1. He complained of Ziba, his servant, who should have been his friend, but had been in two ways his enemy; for, first, he had hindered him from going along with the king, by taking the ass himself which he was ordered to make ready for his master (v. 26), basely taking advantage of his lameness and his inability to help himself; and, secondly, he had accused him to David of a design to usurp the government, v. 27. How much mischief is it in the power of a wicked servant to do to the best master! 2. He gratefully acknowledged the king's great kindness to him when he and all his father's house lay at the king's mercy, v. 28. When he might justly have been dealt with as a rebel, he was treated as a friend, as a child: *Thou didst set thy servant among those that did eat at thy own table.* This shows that Ziba's suggestion was improbable; for could Mephibosheth be so foolish as to aim higher when he lived so easily, so happily as he did? And could he be so very disingenuous as to design any harm to David, of whose great kindness to him he was thus sensible? (3.) He referred his cause to the king's pleasure (*Do what is good in thy eyes with me and my estate*), depending on the king's wisdom, and his ability to discern between truth and falsehood (*My lord the king is as an angel from God*), and disclaiming all pretensions of his own merit: "So much kindness I have received above what I deserved, and *what right have I to cry any more unto the king?* Why should I trouble the king with my complaints when I have already been so troublesome to him? Why should I think any thing hard that is put upon me when I have hitherto been so kindly treated?" We were all *as dead men before God*; yet he has not only spared us, but *taken us to sit at his table.* How little reason then have we to complain of any trouble we are in, and how much reason to take all well that God does!

III. David hereupon recalls the sequestration of Mephibosheth's estate; being deceived in his grant, he revokes it, and confirms his former settlement of it: "*I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land* (v. 29), that is, Let it be as I first ordered it (*ch ix. 10*); the property shall still be vested in thee, but Ziba shall have the occupancy: he shall till the land, paying thee a rent." Thus Mephibosheth is where he was; no harm is done, only Ziba goes away unpunished for

his false and malicious information against his master. David either feared him too much, or loved him too well, to do justice upon him according to that law, Deut. xix. 18, 19; and he was now in the humour of forgiving and resolved to make every body easy.

IV. Mephibosheth drowns all his cares about his estate in his joy for the king's return (v. 30): "*Yea, let him take all*, the presence and favour of the king shall be to me instead of all. A good man can contentedly bear his own private losses and disappointments, while he sees Israel in peace, and the throne of the Son of David exalted and established. Let Ziba take all, so that David may be in peace.

31 And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. 32 Now Barzillai was a very aged man, *even* fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he *was* a very great man. 33 And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. 34 And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? 35 *I am* this day fourscore years old: *and* can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? 36 Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? 37 Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, *and be buried* by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. 38 And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, *that* will I do for thee. 39 And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king

kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.

David had already graced the triumphs of his restoration with the generous remission of the injuries that had been done to him; we have him here gracing them with a no less generous reward of the kindnesses that had been shown to him. Barzillai, the Gileadite, who had a noble seat at Rogelim, not far from Mahanaim, was the man who, of all the nobility and gentry of that country, had been most kind to David in his distress. If Absalom had prevailed, it is likely he would have suffered for his loyalty; but now he and his shall be no losers by it. Here is,

I. Barzillai's great respect to David, not only as a good man, but as his rightful sovereign: He *provided him with much sustenance*, for himself and his family, *while he lay at Mahanaim*, v. 32. God had given him a large estate, *for he was a very great man*, and, it seems, he had a large heart to do good with it: what else but that is a large estate good for? To reduced greatness generosity obliges us, and to oppressed goodness piety obliges us, to be in a particular manner kind, to the utmost of our power. Barzillai, to show that he was not weary of David, though he was so great a charge to him, attended him to Jordan, and went over with him, v. 31. Let subjects learn hence to render *tribute to whom tribute is due* and *honour to whom honour*, Rom. xiii. 7.

II. The kind invitation David gave him to court (v. 33): *Come thou over with me*. He invited him, 1. That he might have the pleasure of his company and the benefit of his counsel; for we may suppose that he was very wise and good, as well as very rich, otherwise he would not have been called here *a very great man*; for it is what a man is, more than what he has, that renders him truly great. 2. That he might have an opportunity of returning his kindness: "*I will feed thee with me*; thou shalt fare as sumptuously as I fare, and this at Jerusalem, the royal and holy city." David did not take Barzillai's kindness to him as a debt (he was not one of those arbitrary princes who think that whatever their subjects have is theirs when they please), but accepted it and rewarded it as a favour. We must always study to be grateful to our friends, especially to those who have helped us in distress.

III. Barzillai's reply to this invitation, wherein,

1. He admires the king's generosity in making him this offer, lessening his service, and magnifying the king's return for it: *Why should the king recompense it with such a reward?* v. 36. Will the master thank that servant who only does what was his duty to do? He thought he had done himself honour enough in doing the king any service. Thus, when the saints shall be called to inherit the kingdom in consideration of what

they have done for Christ in this world, they will be amazed at the disproportion between the service and the recompence. Matt. xxv. 37, *Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee?*

2. He declines accepting the invitation. He begs his majesty's pardon for refusing so generous an offer: he should think himself very happy in being near the king, but, (1.) He is old, and unfit to remove at all, especially to court. He is old, and unfit for the *business* of the court: "*Why should I go up with the king to Jerusalem? I can do him no service there, in the council, the camp, the treasury, or the courts of justice; for how long have I to live?*" v. 34. Shall I think of going into business, now that I am going out of the world?" He is old, and unfit for the *diversions* of the court, which will be ill-bestowed, and even thrown away, upon one that can relish them so little, v. 35. As it was in Moses's time, so it was in Barzillai's, and it is not worse now, that, *if men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, their strength then is labour and sorrow*, Ps. xc. 10. These were then, and are still, years of which men say they *have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. xii. 1. Dainties are insipid when desire fails; and songs to the aged ear are little better than those sung to a heavy heart, very disagreeable: how should they be otherwise when the daughters of music are brought low? Let those that are old learn of Barzillai to be dead to the delights of sense; let grace second nature, and make a virtue of the necessity. Nay, Barzillai, being old, thinks he shall be a *burden to the king*, rather than any credit to him; and a good man would not go any where to be burdensome, or, if he must be so, will rather be so to his own house than to another's. (2.) He is dying, and must begin to think of his long journey, his removal out of the world, v. 37. It is good for us all, but it especially becomes old people, to think and speak much of dying. "Talk of going to court!" says Barzillai; "Let me go home and *die in my own city*, the place of my father's sepulchre; let me die *by the grave of my father*, that my bones may be quietly carried to the place of their rest. The grave is ready for me, let me go and get ready for it, go and die in my nest."

3. He desires the king to be kind to his son Chimham: *Let him go over with my lord the king*, and have preferment at court. What favour is done to him Barzillai will take as done to himself. Those that are old must not grudge young people those delights which they themselves are past the enjoyment of, nor confine them to their retirements. Barzillai will go back himself, but he will not make Chimham go back with him; though he could ill spare Chimham, yet, thinking it would gratify and advance him, he is willing to do it.

IV. David's farewell to Barzillai. 1. He sends him back into his country with a kiss

and a blessing (v. 39), signifying that in gratitude for his kindnesses he would love him and pray for him, and with a promise that whatever request he should at any time make to him he would be ready to oblige him (v. 38): *Whatsoever thou shalt think of, when thou comest home, to ask of me, that will I do for thee*. What is the chief excellency of power but this, that it gives men a capacity of doing the more good? 2. He takes Chimham forward with him, and leaves it to Barzillai to choose him his preferment: *I will do to him what shall seem good to thee*, v. 38. And, it should seem, Barzillai, who had experienced the innocence and safety of retirement, begged a country seat for him near Jerusalem, but not in it; for, long after, we read of a place near Beth-lehem, David's city, which is called *the habitation of Chimham*, allotted to him, probably, not out of the crown-lands or the forfeited estates, but out of David's paternal estate.

40 Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel. 41 And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? 42 And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? 43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more *right* in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

David came over Jordan attended and assisted only by the men of Judah; but when he had advanced as far as Gilgal, the first stage on this side Jordan, *half the people of Israel* (that is, of their elders and great men) had come to wait upon him, to kiss his hand, and congratulate him on his return, but found they came too late to witness the solemnity of his first entrance. This put them out of humour, and occasioned a quarrel between them and the men of Judah, which was a damp to the joy of the day, and the beginning of further mischief. Here is,

1. The complaint which the men of Israel brought to the king against the men of Judah (v. 41), that they had performed the ceremony of bringing the king over Jordan, and not given them notice, that they might have come to join in it. This reflected upon them, as if they were not so well affected to the king and his restoration as the men of Judah were, whereas the king himself knew that they had spoken of it before the men of Judah thought of it, v. 11. It seemed likewise as if they intended to monopolize the king's favours when he had come back, and to be looked upon as his only friends. See what mischief comes from pride and jealousy.

2. The excuse which the men of Judah made for themselves, v. 42. (1.) They plead relation to the king: "*He is near of kin to us, and therefore in a matter of mere ceremony, as this was, we may claim precedence. It was into our country that he was to be brought, and therefore who so fit as we to bring him?*" (2.) They deny the insinuated charge of self-seeking in what they had done: "*Have we eaten at all of the king's cost? No, we have all borne our own charges. Hath he given us any gift? No, we have no design to engross the advantages of his return; you have come time enough to share in them.*" Too many that attend princes do so only for what they can get.

3. The men of Israel's vindication of their charge, v. 43. They pleaded, "*We have ten parts in the king*" (Judah having Simeon only, whose lot lay within his, to join with him), "and therefore it is a slight upon us that our advice was not asked about *bringing back the king.*" See how uncertain the multitude is. They were lately striving against the king, to drive him out; now they are striving about him, which shall honour him most. A good man and a good cause will thus recover their credit and interest, though, for a time, they may seem to have lost them. See what is commonly the origin of strife, nothing so much as impatience of contempt or the least seeming slight. The men of Judah would have done better if they had taken their brethren's advice and assistance; but, since they did not, why should the men of Israel be so grievously offended? If a good work be done, and well done, let us not be displeased, nor the work disparaged, though we had no hand in it.

4. The scripture takes notice, by way of blame, which of the contending parties managed the cause with most passion: *The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than those of the men of Israel.* Though we have right and reason on our side, yet, if we express ourselves with fierceness, God takes notice of it and is much displeased with it.

## CHAP. XX.

How do the clouds retreat after the rain! No sooner is one of David's troubles over than another arises, as it were out of the ashes of the former, wherein the threatening is fulfilled, that the sword should never depart from his house. 1. Before he reaches Jerusalem a new rebellion is raised by Sheba, v. 1, 2. II. His first work, when he comes to Jerusalem, is to surround his concubines to perpetual imprisonment, v. 3. III. Amasa, whom

he entrusts to raise an army against Sheba, is too slow to his motions, which puts him into a fright, v. 4-6. IV. One of his generals barbarously murders the other, when they are taking the field, v. 7-13. V. Sheba is at length shut up in the city of Abel (v. 14, 15), but the citizens deliver him up to Joab, and so his rebellion is crushed, v. 16-22. The chapter concludes with a short account of David's great officers, v. 23-26.

AND there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. 2 So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem. 3 And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

David, in the midst of his triumphs, has here the affliction to see his kingdom disturbed and his family disgraced.

1. His subjects revolting from him at the instigation of a man of Belial, whom they followed when they forsook the man after God's own heart. Observe, 1. That this happened immediately upon the crushing of Absalom's rebellion. We must not think it strange, while we are in this world, if the end of one trouble be the beginning of another: deep sometimes calls unto deep. 2. That the people were now just returning to their allegiance, when, of a sudden, they flew off from it. When a reconciliation is newly made, it ought to be handled with great tenderness and caution, lest the peace break again before it be settled. A broken bone, when it is set, must have time to knit. 3. That the ring-leader of this rebellion was Sheba, a Benjamite by birth (v. 1), who had his habitation in Mount Ephraim, v. 21. Simeon and he were both of Saul's tribe, and both retained the ancient grudge of that house. Against the kingdom of the Messiah there is an hereditary enmity in the serpent's seed, and a succession of attempts to overthrow it (Ps. ii. 1, 2); but he that sits in heaven laughs at them all. 4. That the occasion of it was that foolish quarrel, which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, between the elders of Israel and the elders of Judah, about bringing the king back. It was a point of honour that was disputed between them, which had most interest in David. "We are more numerous," say the elders of Israel. "We are nearer akin to him," say the elders of Judah. Now one



would think David very safe and happy when his subjects are striving which shall love him best, and be most forward to show him respect; yet even that strife proves the occasion of a rebellion. The men of Israel complained to David of the slight which the men of Judah had put upon them. If he had now countenanced their complaint, commended their zeal, and returned them thanks for it, he might have confirmed them in his interest; but he seemed partial to his own tribe: *Their words prevailed above the words of the men of Israel*; as some read the last words of the foregoing chapter. David inclined to justify them, and, when the men of Israel perceived this, they flew off with indignation. "If the king will suffer himself to be engrossed by the men of Judah, let him and them make their best of one another, and we will set up one for ourselves. We thought we had ten parts in David, but such an interest will not be allowed us; the men of Judah tell us, in effect, *we have no part in him*, and therefore we will have none, nor will we attend him any further in his return to Jerusalem, nor own him for our king." This was proclaimed by Sheba (v. 1), who probably was a man of note, and had been active in Absalom's rebellion; the disgusted Israelites took the hint, and *went up from after David to follow Sheba* (v. 2), that is, the generality of them did so, only the men of Judah adhered to him. Learn hence, (1.) That it is as impolitic for princes to be partial in their attentions to their subjects as it is for parents to be so to their children; both should carry it with an even hand. (2.) Those know not what they do that make light of the affections of their inferiors, by not countenancing and accepting it. Their hatred may be feared whose love is despised. (3.) *The beginning of strife is as the letting forth of water*; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with, Prov. xvii. 14. How great a matter doth a little of this fire kindle! (4.) The perverting of words is the subverting of peace; and much mischief is made by forcing invidious constructions upon what is said and written and drawing consequences that were never intended. The men of Judah said, *The king is near of kin to us*. "By this," say the men of Israel, "you mean that *we have no part in him*;" whereas they meant no such thing. (5.) People are very apt to run into extremes. *We have ten parts in David*, said they; and, almost in the next breath, *We have no part in him*. Today *Hosanna*, to-morrow *Crucify*.

II. His concubines imprisoned for life, and he himself under a necessity of putting them in confinement, because they had been defiled by Absalom, v. 3. David had multiplied wives, contrary to the law, and they proved a grief and shame to him. Those whom he had sinfully taken pleasure in he was now, 1. Obligated, in duty, to put away, they being rendered unclean to him by the

vile uncleanness his son had committed with them. Those whom he had loved must now be loathed. 2. Obligated, in prudence, to shut up in privacy, not to be seen abroad for shame, lest the sight of them should give occasion to people to speak of what Absalom had done to them, which ought not to be so much as named, 1 Cor. v. 1. That that villany might be buried in oblivion, they must be buried in obscurity. 3. Obligated, in justice, to shut up in prison, to punish them for their easy submission to Absalom's lust, despairing perhaps of David's return, and giving him up for gone. Let none expect to do ill and fare well.

4 Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present. 5 So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him. 6 And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than *did* Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us. 7 And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. 8 When they *were* at the great stone which *is* in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him and upon it a girdle *with* a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out. 9 And Joab said to Amasa, *Art* thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. 10 But Amasa took no heed to the sword that *was* in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth *rib*, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri. 11 And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that *is* for David, *let him go* after Joab. 12 And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood

still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still. 13 When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

We have here Amasa's fall just as he began to rise. He was nephew to David (*ch. xvii. 25*), had been Absalom's general, and commander-in-chief of his rebellious army; but, that being routed, he came over into David's interest, upon a promise that he should be general of his forces instead of Joab. Sheba's rebellion gives David an occasion to fulfil his promise sooner than he could wish, but Joab's envy and emulation rendered its fulfilment of ill consequence both to him and David.

I. Amasa has a commission to raise forces for the suppressing of Sheba's rebellion, and is ordered to raise them with all possible expedition, *v. 4*. It seems, the men of Judah, though forward to attend the king's triumphs, were backward enough to fight his battles; else, when they were all in a body attending him to Jerusalem, they might immediately have pursued Sheba, and have crushed that cockatrice in the egg. But most love a loyalty, as well as a religion, that is cheap and easy. Many boast of their being akin to Christ that yet are very loth to venture for him. Amasa is sent to assemble the men of Judah within three days; but he finds them so backward and unready that he cannot do it within the time appointed (*v. 5*), though the promotion of Amasa, who had been their general under Absalom, was very obliging to them, and a proof of the clemency of David's government.

II. Upon Amasa's delay, Abishai, the brother of Joab, is ordered to take the guards and standing forces, and with them to pursue Sheba (*v. 6, 7*), for nothing could be of more dangerous consequence than to give him time. David gives these orders to Abishai, because he resolves to mortify Joab, and degrade him, not so much, I doubt, for the blood of Abner, which he had shed basely, as for the blood of Absalom, which he had shed justly and honourably. "Now (says bishop Hall) Joab smarteth for a loyal disobedience. How slippery are the stations of earthly honours and subject to continual mutability! Happy are those who are in favour with him in whom there is no shadow of change." Joab, without orders, though in disgrace, goes along with his brother, knowing he might be serviceable to the public, or perhaps now meditating the removal of his rival.

III. Joab, near Gibeon, meets with Amasa, and barbarously murders him, *v. 8-10*. It should seem, the great stone in Gibeon was

the place appointed for the general rendezvous. There the rivals met; and Amasa, relying upon his commission, went before, as general both of the new-raised forces which he had got together, and of the veteran troops which Abishai had brought in; but Joab there took an opportunity to kill him with his own hand; and, 1. He did it subtly, and with contrivance, and not upon a sudden provocation. He girded his coat about him, that it might not bang in his way, and girded his belt upon his coat, that his sword might be the readier to his hand; he also put his sword in a sheath too big for it, that, whenever he pleased, it might, upon a little shake, fall out, as if it fell by accident, and so he might take it into his hand, unsuspected, as if he were going to return it into the scabbard, when he designed to sheath it in the bowels of Amasa. The more there is of plot in a sin the worse it is. 2. He did it treacherously, and under pretence of friendship, that Amasa might not be upon his guard. He called him *brother*, for they were own cousins, enquired of his welfare (*Art thou in health?*) and *took him by the beard*, as one he was free with, to kiss him, while with the drawn sword in his other hand he was aiming at his heart. Was this done like a gentleman, like a soldier, like a general? No, but like a villain, like a base coward. Just thus he slew Abner, and went unpunished for it, which encouraged him to do the like again. 3. He did it impudently, not in a corner, but at the head of his troops, and in their sight, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to do it, that was so hardened in blood and murders that he could neither blush nor tremble. 4. He did it at one blow, gave the fatal push with a good-will, as we say, so that he needed not strike him again; with such a strong and steady hand he gave this one stroke that it was fatal. 5. He did it in contempt and defiance of David and the commission he had given to Amasa; for that commission was the only ground of his quarrel with him, so that David was struck at through the side of Amasa, and was, in effect, told to his face that Joab would be general, in spite of him. 6. He did it very unseasonably, when they were going against a common enemy and were concerned to be unanimous. This ill-timed quarrel might have scattered their forces, or engaged them one against another, and so have made them all an easy prey to Sheba. So contentedly could Joab sacrifice the interest both of king and kingdom to his personal revenge.

IV. Joab immediately resumes his general's place, and takes care to lead the army on in pursuit of Sheba, that, if possible, he might prevent any prejudice to the common cause by what he had done. 1. He leaves one of his men to make proclamation to the forces that were coming up that they were still engaged in David's cause, but under Joab's command, *v. 11*. He knew what an

interest he had in the soldiery, and how many favoured him rather than Amasa, who had been a traitor, was now a turn-coat, and had never been successful; on this he boldly relied, and called them all to follow him. What man of Judah would not be for his old king and his old general? But one would wonder with what face a murderer could pursue a traitor; and how, under such a heavy load of guilt, he had courage to enter upon danger. Surely his conscience was seared with a hot iron. 2. care is taken to remove the dead body out of the way, because at that they made a stand (as *ch. ii. 23*), and to cover it with a cloth, *v. 12, 13*. Wicked men think themselves safe in their wickedness if they can but conceal it from the eye of the world: if it be hidden, it is with them as if it were never done. But the covering of blood with a cloth cannot stop its cry in God's ear for vengeance, or make it the less loud. However, since this was no time to arraign Joab for what he had done, and the common safety called for expedition, it was prudent to remove that which retarded the march of the army; and then they all went on after Joab, while David, who no doubt had notice soon brought him of this tragedy, could not but reflect upon it with regret that he had not formerly done justice upon Joab for the death of Abner, and that he now had exposed Amasa by preferring him. And perhaps his conscience reminded him of his employing Joab in the murder of Uriah, which had helped to harden him in cruelty.

14 And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Beth-maachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him. 15 And they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down. 16 Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee. 17 And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, *Art thou Joab?* And he answered, *I am he.* Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. 18 Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask *counsel* at Abel: and so they ended *the matter*. 19 *I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy*

a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD? 20 And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy. 21 The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, *even* against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. 22 Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast *it* out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

We have here the conclusion of Sheba's attempt.

I. The rebel, when he had rambled over all the tribes of Israel, and found them not so willing, upon second thoughts, to follow him, as they had been upon a sudden provocation to desert David (having only picked up a few like himself, that sided with him), at length entered Abel-Beth-maachah, a strong city in the north, in the lot of Naphtali, where we find it placed, 2 Kings xv. 29. Here he took shelter, whether by force or with consent does not appear; but his adherents were mostly Berites, of Beeroth in Benjamin, *v. 14*. One bad man will find or make more.

II. Joab drew up all his force against the city, besieged it, battered the wall, and made it almost ready for a general storm, *v. 15*. Justly is that place attacked with all this fury which dares harbour a traitor; nor will that heart fare better which indulges those rebellious lusts that will not have Christ to reign over them.

III. A discreet good woman of the city of Abel brings this matter, by her prudent management, to a good issue, so as to satisfy Joab and yet save the city. Here is,

1. Her treaty with Joab, and her capitulation with him, by which he is engaged to raise the siege, upon condition that Sheba be delivered up. It seems, none of all the men of Abel, none of the elders or magistrates, offered to treat with Joab, no, not when they were reduced to the last extremity. They were stupid and unconcerned for the public safety, or they stood in awe of Sheba, or they despaired of gaining any good terms with Joab, or they had not sense enough to manage the treaty. But this one woman with her wisdom saved the city. Souls know

no difference of sexes. Though the man be the head, it does not therefore follow that he has the monopoly of the brains, and therefore he ought not, by any salique law, to have the monopoly of the crown. Many a masculine heart, and more than masculine, has been found in a female breast; nor is the treasure of wisdom the less valuable for being lodged in the weaker vessel. In the treaty between this nameless heroine and Joab,

(1.) She gains his audience and attention, v. 16, 17. We may suppose it was the first time he had ever treated with a woman in martial affairs.

(2.) She reasons with him on behalf of her city, and very ingeniously. [1.] That it was a city famous for wisdom (v. 18), as we translate it. She pleads that this city had been long in such reputation for prudent knowing men that it was the common referee of the country, and all agreed to abide by the award of its elders. Their sentence was an oracle; let them be consulted and the matter is ended, all sides will acquiesce. Now shall such a city as this be laid in ashes and never treated with? [2.] That the inhabitants were generally peaceable and faithful in Israel, v. 19. She could speak, not for herself only, but for all those whose cause she pleaded, that they were not of turbulent and seditious spirits, but of known fidelity to their prince and peaceableness with their fellow-subjects; they were neither seditious nor litigious. [3.] That it was a mother in Israel, a guide and nurse to the towns and country about; and that it was a part of the inheritance of the Lord, a city of Israelites, not of heathen; and the destruction of it would lessen and weaken that nation which God had chosen for his heritage. [4.] That they expected him to offer them peace before he made an attack upon them, according to that known law of war, Deut. xx. 10. So the margin reads (v. 18): *They plainly spoke in the beginning (of the siege), saying, Surely they will ask of Abel*, that is, "The besiegers will demand the traitor, and will ask us to surrender him; and, if they do, we will soon come to an agreement, and so end the matter." Thus she tacitly upbraids Joab for not offering them peace, but hopes it is not too late to beg it.

(3.) Joab and Abel's advocate soon agree that Sheba's head shall be the ransom of the city. Joab, though in a personal quarrel he had lately swallowed up and destroyed Amasa, yet, when he acts as a general, will by no means bear the imputation of delighting in bloodshed: "*Far be it from me that I should delight to swallow up or destroy*, or design it, but when it is necessary for the public safety, v. 20. The matter is not so. Our quarrel is not with your city; we would hazard our lives for its protection. Our quarrel is only with the traitor that is harboured among you; deliver him up, and we have done." A great deal of mischief would be prevented if con-

tending parties would but understand one another. The city obstinately holds out, believing Joab aims at its ruin. Joab furiously attacks it, believing the citizens all confederates with Sheba. Whereas both were mistaken; let both sides be undeceived, and the matter is soon accommodated. The single condition of peace is the surrender of the traitor. It is so in God's dealing with the soul, when it is besieged by conviction and distress: sin is the traitor; the beloved lust is the rebel; part with that, cast away the transgression, and all shall be well. No peace on any other terms. Our wise woman immediately agrees to the proposal: *Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee presently*.

2. Her treaty with the citizens. She went to them in her wisdom (and perhaps she had as much need of it in dealing with them as in dealing with Joab) and persuaded them to cut off Sheba's head, probably by some public order of their government, and it was thrown over the wall to Joab. He knew the traitor's face, and therefore looked no further, intending not that any of his adherents should suffer. The public safety was secured, and he felt no wish to gratify the public revenge. Joab hereupon raised the siege, and marched back to Jerusalem, with the trophies rather of peace than victory.

23 Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites: 24 And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder: 25 And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: 26 And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

Here is an account of the state of David's court after his restoration. Joab retained the office of general, being too great to be displaced. Benaiah, as before, was captain of the guards. Here is one new office erected, which we had not (*ch. viii. 16—18*), that of *treasurer*, or one *over the tribute*, for it was not till towards the latter end of his time that David began to raise taxes. Adoram was long in this office, but it cost him his life at last, 1 Kings xii. 18.

#### CHAP. XXI.

The date of the events of this chapter is uncertain. I incline to think that they happened as they are here placed, after Absalom's and Sheba's rebellion, and towards the latter end of David's reign. That the battles with the Philistines, mentioned here, were long after the Philistines were subdued, appears by comparing 1 Chron. xviii. 1 with ch. xv. 4. The numbering of the people was just before the fixing of the place of the temple (as appears 1 Chron. xxii. 1), and that was towards the close of David's life; and, it should seem, the people were numbered just after the three years' famine for the Gibeonites, for that which is threatened as "three" years' famine (1 Chron. xxi. 12) is called "seven" years (2 Sam. xxi. 12, 13), three more, with the year current, added to those three. We have here, 1. The Gibeonites avenged, 1. By a famine in the land, ver. 1. 2. By the putting of seven of Saul's posterity to death (ver. 2—9), care, however, being taken of their dead bodies, and of the bones of Saul, ver. 10—14. 11. The giants of the Philistines slain in several battles, ver. 15—22.

**T**HEN there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, *It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.* 2 And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) 3 Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD? 4 And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, *that will I do for you.* 5 And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us *that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel,* 6 Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, *whom the LORD did choose.* And the king said, I will give *them.* 7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that *was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.* 8 But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite: 9 And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell *all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.*

Here, I. We are told of the injury which Saul had, long before this, done to the Gibeonites, which we had no account of in

the history of his reign, nor should we have heard of it here but that it came now to be reckoned for. The Gibeonites were of the remnant of the Amorites (v. 2), who by a stratagem had made peace with Israel, and had the public faith pledged to them by Joshua for their safety. We had the story Josh. ix., where it was agreed (v. 23) that they should have their lives secured, but be deprived of their lands and liberties, that they and theirs should be tenants in villanage to Israel. It does not appear that they had broken their part of the covenant, either by denying their service or attempting to recover their lands or liberties; nor was this pretended; but Saul, under colour of zeal for the honour of Israel, that it might not be said that they had any of the natives among them, aimed to root them out, and, in order to that, slew many of them. Thus he would seem wiser than his predecessors the judges, and more zealous for the public interest; and perhaps he designed it for an instance of his royal prerogative and the power which as king he assumed to rescind the former acts of government and to disannul the most solemn leagues. It may be, he designed, by this severity towards the Gibeonites, to atone for his clemency towards the Amalekites. Some conjecture that he sought to cut off the Gibeonites at the same time when he put away the witches (1 Sam. xxviii. 3), or perhaps many of them were remarkably pious, and he sought to destroy them when he slew the priests their masters. That which made this an exceedingly sinful sin was that he not only shed innocent blood, but therein violated the solemn oath by which the nation was bound to protect them. See what brought ruin on Saul's house: it was a bloody house.

II. We find the nation of Israel chastised with a sore famine, long after, for this sin of Saul. Observe, 1. Even in the land of Israel, that fruitful land, and in the reign of David, that glorious reign, there was a famine, not extreme (for then notice would sooner have been taken of it and enquiry made into the cause of it), but great drought, and scarcity of provisions, the consequence of it, for three years together. If corn miss one year, commonly the next makes up the deficiency; but, if it miss three years successively, it will be a sore judgment; and the man of wisdom will by it hear God's voice crying to the country to repent of the abuse of plenty. 2. David enquired of God concerning it. Though he was himself a prophet, he must consult the oracle, and know God's mind in his own appointed way. Note, When we are under God's judgments we ought to enquire into the grounds of the controversy. *Lord, show me wherefore thou contendest with me.* It is strange that David did not sooner consult the oracle, not till the third year; but perhaps, till then, he apprehended it not to be an extraordinary judgment for some particular sin. Even good men are often

slack and remiss in doing their duty. We continue in ignorance, and under mistake, because we delay to enquire. 3. God was ready in his answer, though David was slow in his enquiries: *It is for Saul*. Note, God's judgments often look a great way back, which obliges us to do so when we are under his rebukes. It is not for us to object against the people's smarting for the sin of their king (perhaps they were aiding and abetting), nor against this generation's suffering for the sin of the last. God often *visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children, and his judgments are a great deep*. He gives not account of any of his matters. Time does not wear out the guilt of sin; nor can we build hopes of impunity upon the delay of judgments. There is no statute of limitation to be pleaded against God's demands. *Nullum tempus occurrit Deo—God may punish when he pleases*.

III. We have vengeance taken upon the house of Saul for the turning away of God's wrath from the land, which, at present, smarted for his sin.

1. David, probably by divine direction, referred it to the Gibeonites themselves to prescribe what satisfaction should be given them for the wrong that had been done them, *v. 3*. They had many years remained silent, had not appealed to David, nor given the kingdom any disturbance with their complaints or demands; and now, at length, God speaks for them (*I heard not, for thou wilt hear, Ps. xxxviii. 14, 15*); and they are recompensed for their patience with this honour, that they are made judges in their own case, and have a blank given them to write their demands on: *What you shall say, that will I do (v. 4)*, that atonement may be made, and that *you may bless the inheritance of the Lord, v. 3*. It is sad for any family or nation to have the prayers of oppressed innocency against them, and therefore the expense of a just restitution is well bestowed for the retrieving of the blessing of those that were ready to perish, *Job xxix. 13*. "My servant Job, whom you have wronged, shall pray for you," says God, "and then I will be reconciled to you, and not till then." Those understand not themselves that value not the prayers of the poor and despised.

2. They desired that seven of Saul's posterity might be put to death, and David granted their demand. (1.) They required *gravel, nor gold, v. 4*. Note, Money is no satisfaction for blood, see *Num. xxxv. 31—33*. It is the ancient law that blood calls for blood (*It is life for life, Gen. ix. 6*); and those over-value money, (Gen. *xxv. 49*), that sell the blood of and relations for corruptible things, *such as their red gold*. The Gibeonites had now a silver opportunity to get a discharge from their fair opportunity, in compensation for the wrong servitude, according to the equity of that done them, *xxi. 26*), *If a man strike out his law (Exod. xxi. 26), he shall let him go free for his servant's eye's sake*. But they did not insist on this;

though the covenant was broken on the other side, it should not be broken on theirs. They were *Nethinim*, given to God and his people Israel, and they would not seem weary of the service. (2.) They required no lives but of Saul's family. He had done them the wrong, and therefore his children must pay for it. We sue the heirs for the parents' debts. Men may not extend this principle so far as life, *Deut. xxiv. 16*. *The children, in an ordinary course of law, shall never be put to death for the parents*. But this case of the Gibeonites was altogether extraordinary. God had made himself an immediate party to the cause, and no doubt put it into the heart of the Gibeonites to make this demand, for he owned what was done (*v. 14*), and his judgments are not subject to the rules which men's judgments must be subject to. Let parents take heed of sin, especially the sin of cruelty and oppression, for their poor children's sake, who may be smarting for it by the just hand of God when they themselves are in their graves. Guilt and a curse are a bad entail upon a family. It should seem, Saul's posterity trod in his steps, for it is called a *bloody house*; it was the spirit of the family, and therefore they are justly reckoned with for his sin, as well as for their own. (3.) They would not impose it upon David to do this execution: *Thou shalt not for us kill any man (v. 4)*, but we will do it ourselves, *we will hang them up unto the Lord (v. 6)*, that, if there were any hardship in it, they might bear the blame, and not David or his house. By our old law, if a murderer had judgment given against him upon an appeal, the relations that appealed had the executing of him. (4.) They did not require this out of malice against Saul or his family (had they been revengeful, they would have moved it themselves long before), but out of love to the people of Israel, whom they saw plagued for the injury done to them: "*We will hang them up unto the Lord (v. 6)*, to satisfy his justice, not to gratify any revenge of our own—for the good of the public, not for our own reputation." (5.) The nomination of the persons they left to David, who took care to secure Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, that, while he was avenging the breach of one oath, he might not himself break another (*v. 7*); but he delivered up two of Saul's sons whom he had by a concubine, and five of his grandsons, whom his daughter Merab bore to Adriel (*1 Sam. xviii. 19*), but his daughter Michal brought up, *v. 8*. Now Saul's treachery was punished, in giving Merab to Adriel, when he had promised her to David, with a design to provoke him. "It is a dangerous matter," says bishop Hall upon this, "to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones; if their meekness have easily remitted it, their God will not pass it over without a severe retribution, though it may be long first." (6.) The place, time, and manner, of their

execution, all added to the solemnity of their being sacrificed to divine justice. [1.] They were hanged up, as anathemas, under a peculiar mark of God's displeasure; for the law had said, *He that is hanged is accursed of God*, Deut. xxi. 23; Gal. iii. 13. Christ being made a curse for us, and dying to satisfy for our sins and to turn away the wrath of God, became obedient to this ignominious death. [2.] They were hanged up in Gibeah of Saul (v. 6), to show that it was for his sin that they died. They were hanged, as it were, before their own door, to expiate the guilt of the house of Saul; and thus God accomplished the ruin of that family, for the blood of the priests, and their families, which, doubtless, now came in remembrance before God, and inquisition was made for it, Ps. ix. 12. Yet the blood of the *Gibeonites* only is mentioned, because that was shed in violation of a sacred oath, which, though sworn long before, though obtained by a wile, and the promise made to Canaanites, yet is thus severely reckoned for. The despising of the oath, and breaking of the covenant, will be recompensed on the head of those who thus profane God's sacred name, Ezek. xvii. 18, 19. And thus God would show that with him rich and poor meet together. Even royal blood must go to atone for the blood of Gibeonites, who were but the vassals of the congregation. [3.] They were put to death in the *days of harvest* (v. 9), at the *beginning of harvest* (v. 10), to show that they were thus sacrificed for the turning away of that wrath of God which had withheld from them their harvest-mercies for some years past, and to obtain his favour in the present harvest. Thus there is no way of appeasing God's anger but by mortifying and crucifying our lusts and corruptions. In vain do we expect mercy from God, unless we do justice upon our sins. Those executions must not be complained of as cruel which have become necessary to the public welfare. Better that seven of Saul's bloody house be hanged than that all Israel be famished.

10 And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. 11 And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. 12 And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them,

when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: 13 And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. 14 And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

Here we have, I. Saul's sons not only hanged, but hanged in chains, their dead bodies left hanging, and exposed, till the judgment ceased, which their death was to turn away, by the sending of rain upon the land. They died as sacrifices, and thus they were, in a manner, offered up, not consumed all at once by fire, but gradually by the air. They died as anathemas, and by this ignominious usage they were represented as execrable, because iniquity was laid upon them. When our blessed Saviour was made sin for us he was made a curse for us. But how shall we reconcile this with the law which expressly required that those who were hanged should be buried on the same day? Deut. xxi. 23. One of the Jewish rabbin wishes this passage of story expunged, *that the name of God might be sanctified*, which, he thinks, is dishonoured by his acceptance of that which was a violation of his law: but this was an extraordinary case, and did not fall within that law; nay, the very reason for that law is a reason for this exception. He that is thus left hanged is accursed; therefore ordinary malefactors must not be so abused; but therefore these must, because they were sacrificed, not to the justice of the nation, but for the crime of the nation (no less a crime than the violation of the public faith) and for the deliverance of the nation from no less a judgment than a general famine. Being thus made as the *off-scouring of all things*, they were made a *spectacle to the world* (1 Cor. iv. 9, 13), God appointing, or at least allowing it.

II. Their dead bodies watched by Rizpah, the mother of two of them, v. 10. It was a great affliction to her, now in her old age, to see her two sons, who, we may suppose, had been a comfort to her, and were likely to be the support of her declining years, cut off in this dreadful manner. None know what sorrows they are reserved for. She may not see them decently interred, but they shall be decently attended. She attempts not to violate the sentence passed upon them, that they should hang there till God sent rain; she neither steals nor forces away their dead bodies, though the divine law might have been cited to bear her out; but she patiently submits, pitches a tent of

sackcloth near the gibbets, where, with her servants and friends, she protects the dead bodies from birds and beasts of prey. Thus, 1. She indulged her grief, as mourners are too apt to do, to no good purpose. When sorrow, in such cases, is in danger of growing excessive, we should rather study how to divert and pacify it than how to humour and gratify it. Why should we thus harden ourselves in sorrow? 2. She testified her love. Thus she let the world know that her sons died, not for any sin of their own, not as stubborn and rebellious sons, *whose eye had despised to obey their mother*; if that had been the case, she would have suffered the *ravens of the valley to pick it out and the young eagles to eat it*, Prov. xxx. 17. But they died for their father's sin, and therefore her mind could not be alienated from them by their hard fate. Though there is no remedy, but they must die, yet they shall die pitied and lamented.

III. The solemn interment of their dead bodies, with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, in the burying-place of their family. David was so far from being displeased at what Rizpah had done that he was himself stirred up by it to do honour to the house of Saul, and to these branches of it among the rest; thus it appeared that it was not out of any personal disgust to the family that he delivered them up, and that he had not desired the woeful day, but that he was obliged to do it for the public good. 1. He now be thought himself of removing the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the place where the men of Jabesh-Gilead had decently, but privately and obscurely, interred them, *under a tree*, 1 Sam. xxxi. 12, 13. Though the shield of Saul was vilely cast away, as if he had not been anointed with oil, yet let not royal dust be lost in the graves of the common people. Humanity obliges us to respect human bodies, especially of the great and good, in consideration both of what they have been and what they are to be. 2. With them he buried the bodies of those that were hanged; for, when God's anger was turned away, they were no longer to be looked upon as a curse, c. 13, 14. When *water dropped upon them out of heaven* (c. 10), that is, when God sent rain to water the earth (which perhaps was not many days after they were hung up), then they were taken down, for then it appeared *that God was entreated for the land*. When justice is done on earth vengeance from heaven ceases. Through Christ, who was hanged on a tree and so made a curse for us, to expiate our guilt (though he was himself guiltless), God is pacified, and is entreated for us: and it is said (Acts xiii. 29) *that when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, in token of the completeness of the sacrifice and of God's acceptance of it, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulchre*.

15 Moreover the Philistines had

yet war again with Israel: and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint. 16 And Ishbi-benob, which *was* of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear *weighed* three hundred *shekels* of brass in weight, he being girded with a new *sword*, thought to have slain David. 17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah, succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel. 18 And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which *was* of the sons of the giant. 19 And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Beth-lehemite, slew *the brother of Goliath* the Gittite, the staff of whose spear *was* like a weaver's beam. 20 And there was yet a battle in Gath, where there was a man of *great* stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. 21 And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimeah the brother of David slew him. 22 These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

We have here the story of some conflicts with the Philistines, which happened, as it should seem, in the latter end of David's reign. Though he had so subdued them that they could not bring any great numbers into the field, yet, as long as they had any giants among them to be their champions, they would never be quiet, but took all occasions to disturb the peace of Israel, to challenge them, or make incursions upon them.

I. David himself was engaged with one of the giants. The Philistines began the war yet again, c. 15. The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their attempts against them. David, though old, desired not a writ of ease from the public service, but he went down in person to fight against the Philistines (*Senescit, non segnescit—He grows old, but not indolent*), a sign that he fought not for his own glory (at this age he was loaded with



glory, and needed no more), but for the good of his kingdom. But in this engagement we find him, 1. In distress and danger. He thought he could bear the fatigues of war as well as he had done formerly; his will was good, and he hoped he could do as at other times. But he found himself deceived; age had cut his hair, and, after a little toil, he waxed faint. His body could not keep pace with his mind. The champion of the Philistines was soon aware of his advantage, perceived that David's strength failed him, and, being himself strong and well-armed, *he thought to slay David*; but God was not in his thoughts, and therefore in that very day they all perished. The enemies of God's people are often very strong, very subtle, and very sure of success, like Isbi-benob, but there is no strength, nor counsel, nor confidence against the Lord. 2. Wonderfully rescued by Abishai, who came seasonably in to his relief, *v. 17*. Herein we must own Abishai's courage and fidelity to his prince (to save whose life he bravely ventured his own), but much more the good providence of God, which brought him in to David's succour in the moment of his extremity. Such a cause and such a champion, though distressed, shall not be deserted. When *Abishai succoured him*, gave him a cordial, it may be, to relieve his fainting spirits, or appeared as his second, *he* (namely, David, so I understand it) *smote the Philistine and killed him*; for it is said (*v. 22*) that David had himself a hand in slaying the giants. David fainted, but he did not flee; though his strength failed him, he bravely kept his ground, and then God sent him this help in the time of need, which, though brought him by his junior and inferior, he thankfully accepted, and, with a little recruiting, gained his point, and came off a conqueror. Christ, in his agonies, was strengthened by an angel. In spiritual conflicts, even strong saints sometimes wax faint; then Satan attacks them furiously; but those that stand their ground and resist him shall be relieved, and made more than conquerors. 3. David's servants hereupon resolved that he should never expose himself thus any more. They had easily persuaded him not to fight against Absalom (*ch. xviii. 3*), but against the Philistines he would go, till, having had this narrow escape, it was resolved in council, and confirmed with an oath, that *the light of Israel* (its guide and glory, so David was) should never be put again into such hazard of being blown out. The lives of those who are as valuable to their country as David was ought to be preserved with a double care, both by themselves and others.

II. The rest of the giants fell by the hand of David's servants. 1. Saph was slain by Sibbechai, one of David's worthies, *v. 18*. 1 Chron. xi 29 2 Another, who was brother to Goliath, was slain by Elhanan,

who is mentioned *ch. xxiii. 24*. 3. Another, who was of very unusual bulk, who had more fingers and toes than other people (*v. 20*), and such an unparalleled insolence that, though he had seen the fall of other giants, yet he defied Israel, was slain by *Jonathan the son of Shimea*. Shimea had one son named *Jonadab* (2 Sam. xiii. 3), whom I should have taken for the same with this Jonathan, but that the former was noted for subtlety, the latter for bravery. These giants were probably the remains of the sons of Anak, who, though long feared, fell at last. Now observe, (1.) It is folly for the strong man to *glory in his strength*. David's servants were no bigger nor stronger than other men; yet thus, by divine assistance, they mastered one giant after another. God chooses by the weak things to confound the mighty. (2.) It is common for those to go down slain to the pit who have been *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, Ezek. xxxii. 27. (3.) The most powerful enemies are often reserved for the last conflict. David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four. Death is a Christian's last enemy, and a son of Anak; but, through him that triumphed for us, we hope to be more than conquerors at last, even over that enemy.

## CHAP. XXII.

This chapter is a psalm, a psalm of praise; we find it afterwards inserted among David's psalms (1<sup>st</sup>. xviii.) with some little variation. We have it here as it was first composed for his own closet and his own harp; but there we have it as it was afterwards delivered to the chief musician for the service of the church, a second edition with some amendments; for, though it was calculated primarily for David's case, yet it might indifferently serve the devotion of others, in giving thanks for their deliverances; or it was intended that his people should thus join with him in his thanksgivings, because, being a public person, his deliverances were to be accounted public blessings and called for public acknowledgments. The inspired historian, having largely related David's deliverances in this and the foregoing book, and one particularly in the close of the foregoing chapter, thought fit to record this sacred poem as a memorial of all that had been before related. Some think that David penned this psalm when he was old, upon a general review of the mercies of his life and the many wonderful preservations God had blessed him with, from first to last. We should, in our praises, look as far back as we can, and not suffer time to wear out the sense of God's favours. Others think that he penned it when he was young, upon occasion of some of his first deliverances, and kept it by him for his use afterwards, and that, upon every new deliverance, his practice was to sing this song. But the book of Psalms shows that he varied as there was occasion, and confined not himself to one form. Here is, 1. The title of the psalm, *ver. 1*. II. The psalm itself, in which, with a very warm devotion and very great fluency and copiousness of expression, 1. He gives glory to God, 2. He takes comfort in him, and he finds matter for both, (1.) In the experiences he had of God's former favours. (2.) In the expectations he had of his further favours. These are intermixed throughout the whole psalm.

AND David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.

Observe here, I. That it has often been the lot of God's people to have many enemies, and to be in imminent danger of falling into their hands. David was a man after God's heart, but not after men's heart: many were those that hated him, and sought his ruin; Saul is particularly named, and either

1. As distinguished from his enemies of the heathen nations. Saul hated David, but David did not hate Saul, and therefore would not reckon him among his enemies; or, rather, 2. As the chief of his enemies, who was more malicious and powerful than any of them. Let not those whom God loves marvel if the world hate them.

II. Those that trust God in the way of duty shall find him a present help to them in their greatest dangers. David did so. God delivered him out of the hand of Saul. He takes special notice of this. Remarkable preservations should be mentioned in our praises with a particular emphasis. He delivered him also out of the hand of all his enemies, one after another, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another; and David, from his own experience, has assured us that, though many are the troubles of the righteous, yet the Lord delivers them out of them all, Ps. xxxiv. 19. We shall never be delivered from all our enemies till we get to heaven: and to that heavenly kingdom God will preserve all that are his, 2 Tim. iv. 18.

III. Those that have received many signal mercies from God ought to give him the glory of them. Every new mercy in our hand should put a new song into our mouth, even praises to our God. Where there is a grateful heart, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak. David spoke, not only to himself, for his own pleasure, nor merely to those about him, for their instruction, but to the Lord, for his honour, the words of this song. Then we sing with grace when we sing to the Lord. In distress he cried with his voice (Ps. cxlii. 1), therefore with his voice he gave thanks. Thanksgiving to God is the sweetest vocal music.

IV. We ought to be speedy in our thankful returns to God: In the day that God delivered him he sang this song. While the mercy is fresh, and our devout affections are most excited by it, let the thank-offering be brought, that it may be kindled with the fire of those affections.

2 And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; 3 The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. 4 I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies. 5 When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; 6 The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; 7 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and

he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. 8 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth. 9 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. 10 He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. 11 And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind. 12 And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. 13 Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled. 14 The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most High uttered his voice. 15 And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. 16 And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. 17 He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters; 18 He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. 19 They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. 20 He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me. 21 The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 23 For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. 24 I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. 25 Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. 26 With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt show thyself upright. 27 With the pure thou wilt show thyself

pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself unsavoury. 28 And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. 29 For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. 30 For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall. 31 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. 32 For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? 33 God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. 34 He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places. 35 He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. 36 Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great. 37 Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip. 38 I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them. 39 And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under my feet. 40 For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me hast thou subdued under me. 41 Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. 42 They looked, but there was none to save; even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. 43 Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad. 44 Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me. 45 Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me. 46 Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places. 47 The LORD liveth; and

blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation. 48 It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me, 49 And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. 50 Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. 51 He is the tower of salvation for his king: and showeth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.

Let us observe, in this song of praise,

I. How David adores God, and gives him the glory of his infinite perfections. There is none like him, nor any to be compared with him (v. 32): *Who is God, save the Lord?* All others that are adored as deities are counterfeits and pretenders. None is to be relied on but he. *Who is a rock, save our God?* They are dead, but *the Lord liveth*, v. 47. They disappoint their worshippers when they most need them. But *as for God his way is perfect*, v. 31. Men begin in kindness, but end not—promise, but perform not; but God will finish his work, and his word is tried, and what we may trust.

II. How he triumphs in the interest he has in this God, and his relation to him, which he lays down as the foundation of all the benefits he has received from him: *He is my God*; as such he cries to him (v. 7), and cleaves to him (v. 22); "and, if *my God*, then *my rock*" (v. 2), that is, "my strength and my power (v. 33), the rock under which I take shelter (he who is to me as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land), the rock on which I build my hope," v. 3. Whatever is my strength and support, it is *the God of my rock that makes it so*; nay, he is *the God of the rock of my salvation* (v. 47): my saving strength is in him and from him. David often hid himself in a rock (1 Sam. xxiv. 2), but God was his chief hiding-place. "He is my fortress, in which I am safe and think myself so—*my high tower*, or stronghold, in which I am out of the reach of real evils—the *tower of salvation* (v. 51), which can never be scaled, nor battered, nor undermined. Salvation itself saves me. Am I in distress? he is my deliverer—struck at, shot at? he is my shield—pursued? he is my refuge—oppressed? he is my saviour, that rescues me out of the hand of those that seek my ruin. Nay, he is the *horn of my salvation*, by which I am strongly protected, and my enemies are strongly pushed." Christ is spoken of as the *horn of salvation* in the house of David, Luke i. 69 "Am I burdened, and ready to

sink? *The Lord is my stay* (v. 19), by whom I am supported. Am I in the dark, benighted, at a loss? *Thou art my lamp, O Lord!* to show me my way, and thou wilt dispel *my darkness,*" v. 29. If we sincerely take the Lord for our God, all this, and much more, he will be to us, all we need and can desire.

III. What improvement he makes of his interest in God. If he be mine, 1. *In him will I trust* (v. 3), that is, "I will resign myself to his direction, and then depend upon his power, and wisdom, and goodness, to conduct me well. 2. *On him I will call* (v. 4), *for he is worthy to be praised.* What we have found in God that is worthy to be praised should engage us to pray to him, and thereby we do in effect praise him and give glory to him. 3. *To him will I give thanks* (v. 50), and that publicly. When he was among the heathen he would neither be afraid nor ashamed to own his obligations to the God of Israel.

IV. The full and large account he keeps for himself, and gives to others, of the great and kind things God had done for him. This takes up most of the song. He gives God the glory both of his deliverances and of his successes, showing both the perils he was delivered from and the power he was advanced to.

1. He magnifies the great salvations God had wrought for him. God sometimes brings his people into very great difficulties and dangers, that he may have the honour of saving them and they the comfort of being saved by him. He owns, *Thou hast saved me from violence* (v. 3), *from my enemies* (v. 4), *from my strong enemy*, meaning Saul, who, if God had not succoured him, would have been too hard for him, v. 18. *Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation*, v. 36. To magnify the salvation, he observes,

(1.) That the danger was very great and threatening out of which he was delivered. Men *rose up against him* (v. 40, 49) that *hated him* (v. 41), a *violent man* (v. 49), namely, Saul, who was malicious in his designs against him and vigorous in his pursuit. This is expressed figuratively, v. 5, 6. He was surrounded with death on every side, threatened to be overwhelmed, and saw no way of escape. So violently did the waves of death beat upon him, so strongly did the cords and snares of death hold him, that he could not help himself, any more than a man in the grave can. The floods of Belial, the wicked one, and his wicked instruments, made him afraid; he trembled to see not only earth, but death and hell, in arms against him.

(2.) That his deliverance was an answer to prayer, v. 7. He has here left us a good example, when we are in distress, to cry unto God with importunity, as children in a fright cry to their parents; and great encouragement to do so, in that he found God ready to answer prayer out of his temple in heaven, where he is continually served and adored.

(3.) That God appeared in a singular and extraordinary manner for him and against his enemies. The expressions are borrowed from the descent of the divine Majesty upon Mount Sinai, v. 8, 9, &c. We do not find that in any of David's battles God fought for him with thunder (as in Samuel's time), or with hail (as in Joshua's time), or with the stars in their courses (as in Deborah's time); but these lofty metaphors are used, [1.] To set forth the glory of God, which was manifested in his deliverance. God's wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness, his justice and holiness, and his sovereign dominion over all the creatures and all the counsels of men, which appeared in favour of David, were as clear and bright a discovery of God's glory to an eye of faith as such miraculous interpositions would have been to an eye of sense. [2.] To set forth God's displeasure against his enemies. God so espoused his cause that he showed himself an enemy to all his enemies; his anger is set forth by a *smoke out of his nostrils*, and *fire out of his mouth* (v. 9), *coals kindled* (v. 13), *arrows*, v. 15. Who knows the power and terror of his wrath? [3.] To set forth the extraordinary confusion which his enemies were put into, and the consternation that seized them; as if the earth had trembled and the *foundations of the world* had been discovered, v. 8, 16. Who can stand before God when he is angry? [4.] To show how ready God was to help him: *He rode upon a cherub and did fly*, v. 11. God hastened to his succour, and came to him with seasonable relief, though he had seemed at a distance; yet he was a *God hiding himself* (Isa. xlv. 15), for he made *darkness his pavilion* (v. 12), for the amazement of his enemies and the protection of his own people.

(4.) That God manifested his particular favour and kindness to him in these deliverances (v. 20). *He delivered me, because he delighted in me.* The deliverance came not from common providence, but covenant-love; he was herein treated as a favourite: so he perceived by the communications of divine grace and comfort to his soul with these deliverances, and the communion he had with God in them. Herein he was a type of Christ, whom God upheld because he *delighted in him*, Isa. xlii. 1, 2.

2. He magnifies the great successes God had crowned him with. He had not only preserved but prospered him. He was blessed, (1.) With liberty and enlargement. He was *brought into a large place* (v. 20), where he had room to thrive; and his *steps were enlarged under him*, so that he had room to stir (v. 37), being no longer straitened and confined. (2.) With military skill, and strength, and swiftness. Though he was bred up to the crook, he was well instructed in the arts of war and qualified for the toils and perils of it. God, having called him to

fight his battles, qualified him for the service. He made him very ingenious (*He teacheth my hands to war*, v. 35). And this ingenuity was as good as strength, for it follows, "so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms," not so much by main force as by dexterity), and very vigorous and valiant (*Thou hast girded me with strength to battle*, v. 40). He gives God the glory of all his courage and ability for service), and very expeditious: *He maketh my feet swift like hinds' feet* (v. 34), which is of great advantage both in charging and retreating. (3.) With victory over his enemies, not only Saul and Absalom, but the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, and other neighbouring nations, whom he subdued and made tributaries to Israel. His wonderful victories are here described, r. 38—43. They were *speedy victories* (*I turned not again till I had consumed them*, v. 38), and *complete victories*. The enemies of Israel were *wounded, destroyed, consumed, fell under his feet*, trampled upon, and disabled to rise, and their necks lay at his mercy. They cried both to earth and heaven for help, but in vain. *There was none to save, none that durst appear for them*. God answered them not, for they were not on his side, nor did they cry unto him till they were brought to the last extremity. Being thus abandoned, they became an easy prey to David's righteous and victorious sword, so that he *beat them as small as the dust of the earth*, which is scattered by the wind and trodden on by every foot. (4.) With advancement to honour and power. To this he was anointed before his troubles began, and at length, *post tot discrimina rerum—after all his dangers and disasters*, he gained his point. God *made his way perfect* (v. 33), gave him success in all his undertakings, *set him upon his high places* (v. 34), denoting both safety and dignity. God's gentleness, his grace and tender mercy, *made him great* (v. 36), gave him great wealth, and great authority, and a name like that of the great men of the earth. He was *kept to be the head of the heathen* (v. 44); his signal preservations evinced that he was designed and reserved for something great—to rule over all Israel, notwithstanding the *strivings of the people*, and so that those whom he had not known should serve him, many of the nations that lay remote. Thus he was *lifted up on high*, as high as the throne, above those that rose up against him, v. 49.

V. The comfortable reflections he makes upon his own integrity, which God, by those wonderful deliverances, had graciously owned and witnessed to, v. 21—25. He means especially his integrity with reference to Saul and Ishbosheth, Absalom and Sheba, and those who either opposed his coming to the crown or endeavoured to dethrone him. They falsely accused him and misrepresented him, but he had the testimony of his conscience for him that he was not an ambitious

aspiring man, a false and bloody man, as they called him,—that he had never taken any indirect unlawful courses to secure or raise himself, but in his whole conduct had kept in the way of his duty,—and that in the whole course of his conversation he had, for the main, made religion his business, so that he could take God's favours to him as the rewards of his righteousness, not of debt, but of grace. God had recompensed him, though not for his righteousness, as if that had merited any thing at the hand of God, yet according to his righteousness, which he was well pleased with, and had an eye to. His conscience witnessed for him, 1. That he had made the word of God his rule, and had kept to it, v. 23. Wherever he was, God's judgments were before him as his guide; whithersoever he went, he took his religion along with him; and though he was forced to depart from his country, and sent, as it were, to serve other gods, yet, as for God's statutes, he did not depart from them, but kept the way of the Lord and walked in it. 2. That he had carefully avoided the bye-paths of sin. He had not wickedly departed from his God. He could not say but that he had taken some false steps, but he had not deserted God, nor forsaken his way. Sins of infirmity he could not acquit himself from, but the grace of God had kept him from presumptuous sins. Though he had sometimes *weakly* departed from his duty, he had never *wickedly* departed from his God. By this it appeared that he was *upright before God, or to God* (in his sight, and with an eye to him), that he *kept himself from his own iniquity*, not only from that particular sin of killing Saul when it was in the power of his hand to do it, but, in general, he was afraid of sin and watchful against it, and made conscience of what he said and did. The matter of Uriah is an exception (1 Kings xv. 5), like that in Hezekiah's character, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Note, A careful abstaining from our own iniquity is one of the best evidences of our own integrity; and the testimony of our conscience for us that we have done so will be such a rejoicing as will not only lessen the griefs of an afflicted state, but increase the comforts of a prosperous state. David reflected with more comfort upon his victories over his own iniquity than upon his conquest of Goliath and all the hosts of the uncircumcised Philistines; and the witness of his own heart to his uprightness was sweeter though more silent music than theirs that sang, *David has slain his ten thousands*. If a great man be a good man, his goodness will be much more his satisfaction than his greatness. Let favour be shown to the upright, and his uprightness will sweeten it, will double it.

VI. The comfortable prospects he has of God's further favour. As he looks back, so he looks forward, with pleasure, and assures himself of the kindness God has in store

for all the saints, for himself, and also for his seed.

1. For all good people, *v.* 26—28. As God had dealt with him according to his uprightness, so he will with all others. He takes occasion here to lay down the established rules of God's procedure with the children of men:—

(1.) That he will do good to those that are upright in their hearts. As we are found towards God, he will be found towards us. [1.] God's mercy and grace will be the joy of those that are merciful and gracious. Even the merciful need mercy, and they shall obtain it. [2.] God's uprightness, his justice and faithfulness, will be the joy of those that are upright, just, and faithful, both towards God and man. [3.] God's purity and holiness will be the joy of those that are pure and holy, who therefore give thanks at the remembrance thereof. And, if any of these good people be *afflicted people*, he will save them, either out of their afflictions or by and after them. On the other hand,

(2.) That those who turn aside to crooked ways he will lead forth with the workers of iniquity, as he says in another psalm. *With the froward he will wrestle*; and those with whom God wrestles are sure to be foiled. *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker!* God will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him and be displeased with those that are displeased with him. As for the haughty, his eyes are upon them, marking them out, as it were, to be brought down; for he resists the proud.

2. For himself. He foresaw that his conquests and kingdom would be yet further enlarged, *v.* 45, 46. Even the *sons of the stranger*, that would hear the report of his victories and the tokens of God's presence with him, would be possessed with a fear of him, would be forced to submit to him, though feignedly, and would be obedient to him. The successes which he had had he looked upon as earnest of more and means of more. Who durst oppose him by whom so many had been overcome? Thus the Son of David goes on *conquering and to conquer*, *Rev.* vi. 2. His gospel, which has been victorious, shall be so more and more.

3. For his seed: He *showeth mercy to his Messiah* (*v.* 51), not only to David himself, but to that seed of his for evermore. David was himself anointed of God, not a usurper, but duly called to the government and qualified for it; therefore he doubted not but God would show mercy to him, that mercy which he had promised not to take from him nor from his posterity (*ch.* vii. 15, 16); on that promise he depends, with an eye to Christ, who alone is his *seed for evermore*, whose throne and kingdom still continue, and will to the end, whereas the seed and lineage of David are long since extinct. See *Ps.* lxxxix. 28, 29. Thus all his joys and all his hopes terminate, as ours should, in the great Redeemer.

## CHAP. XXIII.

The historian is now drawing towards a conclusion of David's reign, and therefore gives us an account here, 1. Of some of his last words, which he spoke by inspiration, and which seem to have reference to his seed that was to be for evermore, spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter, *ver.* 1—7. 2. Of the great men, especially the military men, that were employed under him, the first three (*ver.* 8—17), two of the next three (*ver.* 18—23), and then the thirty, *ver.* 24—39.

**N**OW these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man *who was* raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, 2 The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word *was* in my tongue. 3 The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men *must be* just, ruling in the fear of God. 4 And he *shall be* as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. 5 Although my house *be* not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for *this is* all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. 6 But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: 7 But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

We have here the last will and testament of king David, or a codicil annexed to it, after he had settled the crown upon Solomon and his treasures upon the temple which was to be built. The last words of great and good men are thought worthy to be in a special manner remarked and remembered. David would have those taken notice of, and added either to his Psalms (as they are here to that in the foregoing chapter) or to the chronicles of his reign. Those words especially in *v.* 5, though recorded before, we may suppose he often repeated for his own consolation, even to his last breath, and therefore they are called his *last words*. When we find death approaching we should endeavour both to honour God and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those that have had long experience of God's goodness and the pleasantness of wisdom, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise. We have upon record the last words of Jacob and Moses, and here of David, designed, as

those, for a legacy to those that were left behind. We are here told,

I. Whose last will and testament this is. This is related either, as is usual, by the testator himself, or, rather, by the historian, v. 1. He is described, 1. By the meanness of his original: He was *the son of Jesse*. It is good for those who are advanced to be corner-stones and top-stones to be reminded, and often to remind themselves, of *the rock out of which they were hewn*. 2. The height of his elevation: He was *raised up on high*, as one favoured of God, and designed for something great, raised up as a prince, to sit higher than his neighbours, and as a prophet, to see further; for, (1.) He was *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, and so was serviceable to the people of God in their civil interests, the protection of their country and the administration of justice among them. (2.) He was *the sweet psalmist of Israel*, and so was serviceable to them in their religious exercises. He penned the psalms, set the tunes, appointed both the singers and the instruments of music, by which the devotions of good people were much excited and enlarged. Note, The singing of psalms is a sweet ordinance, very agreeable to those that delight in praising God. It is reckoned among the honours to which David was raised up that he was a psalmist: in that he was as truly great as in his being *the anointed of the God of Jacob*. Note, It is true preferment to be serviceable to the church in acts of devotion and instrumental to promote the blessed work of prayer and praise. Observe, Was David a prince? He was so for Jacob. Was he a psalmist? He was so for Israel. Note, The dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and therefore, *as every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same*.

II. What the purport of it is. It is an account of his communion with God. Observe,

1. What God said to him both for his direction and for his encouragement as a king, and to be, in like manner, of use to his successors. Pious persons take a pleasure in calling to mind what they have heard from God, in recollecting his word, and revolving it in their minds. Thus what God spoke once David heard twice, yea often. See here,

(1.) Who spoke: *The Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel*, which some think is an intimation of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead—the Father *the God of Israel*, the Son *the Rock of Israel*, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, *who spoke by the prophets*, and particularly by David, and whose word was not only in his heart, but in his tongue, for the benefit of others. David here avows his divine inspiration, that in his psalms, and in this composition, *The Spirit of God spoke by him*. He, and other holy men, spoke and wrote *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.

This puts an honour upon the book of Psalms, and recommends them to our use in our devotions, that they are words which the Holy Ghost teaches.

(2.) What was spoken. Here seems to be a distinction made between what the Spirit of God spoke by David, which includes all his psalms, and what the Rock of Israel spoke to David, which concerned himself and his family. Let ministers observe that those by whom God speaks to others are concerned to hear and heed what he speaks to themselves. Those whose office it is to teach others their duty must be sure to learn and do their own. Now that which is here said (v. 3, 4) may be considered, [1.] With application to David, and his royal family. And so here is, *First*, The duty of magistrates enjoined them. When a king was spoken to from God he was not to be complimented with the height of his dignity and the extent of his power, but to be told his duty. "Must is for the king," we say. Here is a *must* for the king: *He must be just, ruling in the fear of God*; and so must all inferior magistrates in their places. Let rulers remember that they rule over men—not over beasts which they may enslave and abuse at pleasure, but over reasonable creatures and of the same rank with themselves. They rule over men that have their follies and infirmities, and therefore must be borne with. They rule over men, but under God, and for him; and therefore, 1. They must be just, both to those over whom they rule, in allowing them their rights and properties, and between those over whom they rule, using their power to right the injured against the injurious; see Deut. i. 16, 17. It is not enough that they do no wrong, but they must not suffer wrong to be done. 2. They must rule in the fear of God, that is, they must themselves be possessed with a fear of God, by which they will be effectually restrained from all acts of injustice and oppression. Nehemiah was so (Neh. v. 15) *So did not I, because of the fear of God*, and Joseph, Gen. xlii. 18. They must also endeavour to promote the fear of God (that is, the practice of religion) among those over whom they rule. The magistrate is to be the keeper of both tables, and to protect both godliness and honesty. *Secondly*, Prosperity promised them if they do this duty. *He that rules in the fear of God shall be as the light of the morning*, v. 4. Light is sweet and pleasant, and he that does his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honour. Light is a blessing, nor are there any greater and more extensive blessings to the public than princes that rule in the fear of God. As the *light of the morning*, which is most welcome after the darkness of the night (so was David's government after Saul's, Ps. lxxv. 3), which

is increasing, shines more and more to the perfect day, such is the growing lustre of a good government. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produces for the service of man; it brings with it a harvest of blessings. See Ps. lxxii. 6, 16, which were also some of the last words of David, and seem to refer to those recorded here. [2.] With application to Christ, the Son of David, and then it must all be taken as a prophecy, and the original will bear it: *There shall be a ruler among men, or over men, that shall be just, and shall rule in the fear of God, that is, shall order the affairs of religion and divine worship according to his Father's will; and he shall be as the light of the morning, &c., for he is the light of the world, and as the tender grass, for he is the branch of the Lord, and the fruit of the earth,* Isa. iv. 2. Compare this with those promises of Christ which speak of his *reigning in righteousness* and being of *quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*, Isa. xi. 1—5; xxxii. 1, 2; Ps. lxxii. 2. God, by the Spirit, gave David the foresight of this, to comfort him under the many calamities of his family and the melancholy prospects he had of the degeneracy of his seed.

2. What comfortable use he made of this which God spoke to him, and what were his devout meditations on it, by way of reply, v. 5. It is not unlike his meditation on occasion of such a message, 2 Sam. vii. 18, &c. That which goes before the Rock of Israel spoke to him; this the Spirit of God spoke *by* him, and it is a most excellent confession of his faith and hope in the everlasting covenant. Here is,

(1.) Trouble supposed: *Although my house be not so with God, and although he make it not to grow.* David's family was not so with God as is described (v. 3, 4), and as he could wish, not so good, not so happy; it had not been so while he lived; he foresaw it would not be so when he was gone, that his house would be neither so pious nor so prosperous as one might have expected the offspring of such a father to be. [1.] *Not so with God.* Note, We and ours are that really which we are with God. This was what David's heart was upon concerning his children, that they might be right with God, faithful to him and zealous for him. But the children of godly parents are often neither so holy nor so happy as might be expected. We must be made to know that it is corruption, not grace, that runs in the blood, that the race is not to the swift, but that God gives his Spirit as a free-agent. [2.] *Not made to grow,* in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow or not to grow, Ps. cvii. 41. Good men have often the melancholy prospect of a declining family. David's house was typical of the church of Christ, which is his house, Heb. iii. 3. Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish, suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened, by errors and corrup-

tions, yea, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church's head, the Son of David, that he will preserve to him a seed, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his house. This our Saviour comforted himself with in his sufferings, that the covenant with him stood firm, Isa. liii. 10—12.

(2.) Comfort ensured: *Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.* Whatever trouble a child of God may have the prospect of, still he has some comfort or other to balance it with (2 Cor. iv. 8, 9), and there is none like this of the Psalmist, which may be understood, [1.] Of the covenant of royalty (in the type) which God made with David and his seed, touching the kingdom, Ps. cxxxii. 11, 12. But, [2.] It must look further, to the covenant of grace made with all believers, that God will be, in Christ, to them a God, which was signified by the covenant of royalty, and therefore the promises of the covenant are called *the sure mercies of David*, Isa. lv. 3. It is this only that is the everlasting covenant, and it cannot be imagined that David, who, in so many of his psalms, speaks so clearly concerning Christ and the grace of the gospel, should forget it in his last words. God has made a covenant of grace with us in Jesus Christ, and we are here told, *First*, 'That it is an *everlasting* covenant, from everlasting in the contrivance and counsel of it, and to everlasting in the continuance and consequences of it. *Secondly*, 'That it is *ordered*, well ordered in all things, admirably well, to advance the glory of God and the honour of the Mediator, together with the holiness and comfort of believers. It is herein well ordered, that whatever is required in the covenant is promised, and that every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant, and that it puts our salvation, not in our own keeping, but in the keeping of a Mediator. *Thirdly*, 'That it is *sure*, and therefore sure because well ordered; the general offer of it is sure; the promised mercies are sure on the performance of the conditions. The particular application of it to true believers is sure; it is sure to all the seed. *Fourthly*, 'That it is *all our salvation*. Nothing but this will save us, and this is sufficient: it is this only upon which our salvation depends. *Fifthly*, 'That therefore it must be *all our desire*. Let me have an interest in this covenant and the promises of it, and I have enough, I desire no more.

3. Here is the doom of the sons of Belial read, v. 6, 7. (1.) They shall be thrust away as thorns—rejected, abandoned. They are like thorns, not to be touched with hands, so passionate and furious that they cannot be managed or dealt with by a wise and faithful reproof, but must be restrained by law and the sword of justice (Ps. xxxii. 9); and therefore, like thorns, (2.) They shall, at length, be utterly burnt with fire in the same place, Heb. vi. 8. Now this is intended, [1.] As a direction to magistrates to use their



power for the punishing and suppressing of wickedness. Let them *thrust away the sons of Belial*; see Ps. ci. 8. Or, [2.] As a caution to magistrates, and particularly to David's sons and successors, to see that they be not themselves sons of Belial (as too many of them were), for then neither the dignity of their place nor their relation to David would secure them from being thrust away by the righteous judgments of God. Though men could not deal with them, God would. Or, [3.] As a prediction of the ruin of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom. There are enemies without, that openly oppose it and fight against it, and enemies within, that secretly betray it and are false to it; both are sons of Belial, children of the wicked one, of the serpent's seed; both are as thorns, grievous and vexatous: but both shall be so thrust away as that Christ will set up his kingdom in despite of their enmity, will go *through them* (Isa. xxvii. 4), and will, in due time, bless his church with such peace that there shall be *no pricking brier nor grieving thorn*. And those that will not repent, to give glory to God, shall, in the judgment-day (to which the Chaldee paraphrast refers this), be burnt with unquenchable fire. See Luke xix. 27.

8 These *be* the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same *was* Adino the Eznite: *he lift up his spear* against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time. 9 And after him *was* Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, *one of* the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines *that* were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away: 10 He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil. 11 And after him *was* Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where *was* a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines. 12 But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory. 13 And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched

in the valley of Rephaim. 14 And David *was* then in a hold, and the garrison of the Philistines *was* then *in* Beth-lehem. 15 And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which *is* by the gate! 16 And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that *was* by the gate, and took *it*, and brought *it* to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD. 17 And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: *is not this* the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men. 18 And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, *and* slew *them*, and had the name among three. 19 Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the *first* three. 20 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow: 21 And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. 22 These *things* did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men. 23 He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the *first* three. And David set him over his guard. 24 Asahel the brother of Joab *was* one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Beth-lehem, 25 Shammah the Harodite, Elika the Harodite, 26 Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikesh the Tekoite, 27 Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite, 28 Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, 29 Heleb

the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin, 30 Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash, 31 Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite, 32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, 33 Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, 34 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, 35 Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, 36 Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, 37 Zelek the Ammonite, Nahari the Beerothite, armourbearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah, 38 Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite, 39 Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

I. The catalogue which the historian has here left upon record of the great soldiers that were in David's time is intended, 1. For the honour of David, who trained them up in the arts and exercises of war, and set them an example of conduct and courage. It is the reputation as well as the advantage of a prince to be attended and served by such brave men as are here described. 2. For the honour of those worthies themselves, who were instrumental to bring David to the crown, settle and protect him in the throne, and enlarge his conquests. Note, Those that in public stations venture themselves, and lay out themselves, to serve the interests of their country, are worthy of double honour, both to be respected by those of their own age and to be remembered by posterity. 3. To excite those that come after to a generous emulation. 4. To show how much religion contributes to the inspiring of men with true courage. David, both by his psalms and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom (1 Chron. xxix. 6), and, when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery.

II. Now these mighty men are here divided into three ranks:—

1. The first three, who had done the greatest exploits and thereby gained the greatest reputation—Adino (r. 8), Eleazar (r. 9, 10), and Shammah, r. 11, 12. I do not remember that we read of any of these, or of their actions, any where in all the story of David but here and in the parallel place, 1 Chron. xi. Many great and remarkable events are passed by in the annals, which relate rather the blemishes than the glories of David's reign, especially after his sin in the matter of Uriah; so that we may conclude his reign to

have been really more illustrious than it has appeared to us while reading the records of it. The exploits of this brave triumvirate are here recorded. They signalized themselves in the wars of Israel against their enemies, especially the Philistines. (1.) Adino slew 800 at once with his spear. (2.) Eleazar defied the Philistines, as they by Goliath, had defied Israel, but with better success and greater bravery; for when the men of Israel had gone away, he not only kept his ground, but *arose, and smote the Philistines*, on whom God struck a terror equal to the courage with which this great hero was inspired. His hand was weary, and yet it clave to his sword; as long as he had any strength remaining he held his weapon and followed his blow. Thus, in the service of God, we should keep up the willingness and resolution of the spirit, notwithstanding the weakness and weariness of the flesh—faint, yet pursuing (Judg. viii. 4), the hand weary, yet not quitting the sword. Now that Eleazar had beaten the enemy, the men of Israel, who had gone away from the battle (r. 9), returned to spoil, r. 10. It is common for those who quit the field when any thing is to be done to hasten to it when any thing is to be gotten. (3.) Shammah met with a party of the enemy, that were foraging, and routed them, r. 11, 12. But observe, both concerning this exploit and the former, it is here said, *The Lord wrought a great victory*. Note, How great soever the bravery of the instruments is, the praise of the achievement must be given to God. These fought the battles, but God wrought the victory. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, nor in any of his military operations, but *let him that glories glory in the Lord*.

2. The next three were distinguished from, and dignified above, the thirty, but attained not to the first three, r. 23. All great men are not of the same size. Many a bright and benign star there is which is not of the first magnitude, and many a good ship not of the first rate. Of this second triumvirate two only are named, Abishai and Benaiah, whom we have often met with in the story of David, and who seem to have been not inferior in serviceableness, though they were in dignity, to the first three. Here is,

(1.) A brave action of these three in conjunction. They attended David in his troubles, when he absconded, in the cave of Adullam (r. 13), suffered with him, and therefore were afterwards preferred by him. When David and his brave men who attended him, who had acted so vigorously against the Philistines, were, by the iniquity of the times, in Saul's reign, driven to shelter themselves from his rage in caves and strong holds, no marvel that the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and put a garrison even in Bethlehem itself, r. 13, 14. If the church's guides are so misled as to persecute some of her best friends and champions, the common

enemy will, no doubt, get advantage by it. If David had had his liberty, Bethlehem would not have been now in the Philistines' hands. But, being so, we are here told, [1.] How earnestly David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem. Some make it a public-spirited wish, and that he meant, "O that we could drive the garrison of the Philistines out of Bethlehem, and make that beloved city of mine our own again!" the well being put for the city, as the river often signifies the country it passes through. But, if he meant so, those about him did not understand him; therefore it seems rather to be an instance of his weakness. It was harvest-time; the weather was hot; he was thirsty; perhaps good water was scarce, and therefore he earnestly wished, "O that I could but have one draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" With the water of that well he had often refreshed himself when he was a youth, and nothing now will serve him but that, though it is almost impossible to come at it. He strangely indulged a humour which he could give no reason for. Other water might quench his thirst as well, but he had a fancy for that above any. It is folly to entertain such fancies and greater folly to insist upon the gratification of them. We ought to check our appetites when they go out inordinately towards those things that really are more pleasant and grateful than other things (*Be not desirous of dainties*), much more when they are thus set upon such things as only please a humour. [2.] How bravely his three mighty men, Abishai, Benaiah, and another not named, ventured through the camp of the Philistines, upon the very mouth of danger, and fetched water from the well of Bethlehem, without David's knowledge, v. 16. When he wished for it he was far from desiring that any of his men should venture their lives for it; but those three did, to show, *First*, How much they valued their prince, and with what pleasure they could run the greatest hazards and undergo the greatest hardships in his service. David, though anointed king, was as yet an exile, a poor prince that had no external advantages to recommend him to the affection and esteem of his attendants, nor was he in any capacity to prefer or reward them; yet those three were thus zealous for his satisfaction, firmly believing the time of recompence would come. Let us be willing to venture in the cause of Christ, even when it is a suffering cause, as those who are assured that it will prevail and that we shall not lose by it at last. Were they so forward to expose themselves upon the least hint of their prince's mind and so ambitious to please him? And shall not we covet to approve ourselves to our Lord Jesus by a ready compliance with every intimation of his will given us by his word, Spirit, and providence? *Secondly*, How little they feared the Philistines. They were glad of an occasion to defy them. Whether they

broke through the host clandestinely, and with such art that the Philistines did not discover them, or openly, and with such terror in their looks that the Philistines durst not oppose them, is not certain; it should seem, they forced their way, sword in hand. But see, [3.] How self-denyingly David, when he had this far-fetched dear-bought water, *poured it out before the Lord*, v. 17. *First*, Thus he would show the tender regard he had to the lives of his soldiers, and how far he was from being prodigal of their blood, Ps. lxxii. 14. In God's sight the death of his saints is precious. *Secondly*, Thus he would testify his sorrow for speaking that foolish word which occasioned those men to put their lives in their hands. Great men should take heed what they say, lest any bad use be made of it by those about them. *Thirdly*, Thus he would prevent the like rashness in any of his men for the future. *Fourthly*, Thus he would cross his own foolish fancy, and punish himself for entertaining and indulging it, and show that he had sober thoughts to correct his rash ones, and knew how to deny himself even in that which he was most fond of. Such generous mortifications become the wise, the great, and the good. *Fifthly*, Thus he would honour God and give glory to him. The water purchased at this rate he thought too precious for his own drinking and fit only to be poured out to God as a drink-offering. If it was the blood of these men, it was God's due, for the blood was always his. *Sixthly*, Bishop Patrick speaks of some who think that David hereby showed that it was not material water he longed for, but the Messiah, who had the water of life, who, he knew, should be born at Bethlehem, which the Philistines therefore should not be able to destroy. *Seventhly*, Did David look upon that water as very precious which was got at the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the blood of the covenant, as those do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant.

(2.) The brave actions of two of them on other occasions. Abishai slew 300 men at once, v. 18, 19. Benaiah did many great things. [1.] He slew two Moabites that were lion-like men, so bold and strong, so fierce and furious. [2.] He slew a lion in a pit, either in his own defence, as Samson, or perhaps in kindness to the country, a lion that had done mischief. It being in a time of snow, he was more stiff and the lion more fierce and ravenous, and yet he mastered him. [3.] He slew an Egyptian, on what occasion it is not said; he was well armed, but Benaiah attacked him with no other weapon than a walking staff, dexterously wrested his spear out of his hand, and slew him with it, v. 21. For these and similar exploits David preferred him to be captain of the life-guard or standing forces, v. 23.

3. Inferior to the second three, but of great note, were the thirty-one here mentioned by name, *v.* 24, &c. Asahel is the first, who was slain by Abner in the beginning of David's reign, but lost not his place in this catalogue. Elhanan is the next, brother to Eleazar, one of the first three, *v.* 9. The surnames here given them are taken, as it should seem, from the places of their birth or habitation, as many surnames with us originally were. From all parts of the nation, the most wise and valiant were picked up to serve the king. Several of those who are here named we find captains of the twelve courses which David appointed, one for each month in the year, 1 Chron. xxvii. Those that did worthily were preferred according to their merits. One of them was the son of Alithophel (*v.* 34), the son famous in the camp as the father at the council-board. But to find Uriah the Hittite bringing up the rear of these worthies, as it revives the remembrance of David's sin, so it aggravates it, that a man who deserved so well of his king and country should be so ill treated. Joab is not mentioned among all these, either, (1.) Because he was so great that he did not need to be mentioned; the first of the first three sat chief among the captains, but Joab was over them as general. Or, (2.) Because he was so bad that he did not deserve to be mentioned; for though he was confessedly a great soldier, and one that had so much religion in him as to dedicate of his spoils to the house of God (1 Chron. xxvi. 28), yet he lost as much honour by slaying two of David's friends as ever he got by slaying his enemies.

Christ, the Son of David, has his worthies too, who, like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom, and in his strength are more than conquerors. Christ's apostles were his immediate attendants, did and suffered great things for him, and at length came to reign with him. They are mentioned with honour in the New Testament, as these in the Old, especially, Rev. xxi. 14. Nay, all the good soldiers of Jesus Christ have their names better preserved than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honour have all his saints.

#### CHAP. XXIV.

The last words of David, which we read in the chapter before, were admirably good, but in this chapter we read of some of his last works, which were none of the best; yet he repented, and did his first works again, and so he finished well. We have here, I. His sin, which was numbering the people in the pride of his heart, *ver.* 1-9. II. His conviction of the sin, and repentance for it, *ver.* 10. III. The judgment inflicted upon him for it, *ver.* 11-13. IV. The staying of the judgment, *ver.* 16, 17. V. The erecting of an altar in token of God's reconciliation to him and his people, *ver.* 19-25.

**A**ND again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. **2** For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go

now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. **3** And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, a hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? **4** Notwithstanding the king's words prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. **5** And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that *lieth* in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer: **6** Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon, **7** And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beer-sheba. **8** So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. **9** And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

Here we have,

I. The orders which David gave to Joab to number the people of Israel and Judah, *r.* 1, 2. Two things here seem strange:—1. The sinfulness of this. What harm was there in it? Did not Moses twice number the people without any crime? Does not political arithmetic come in among the other policies of a prince? Should not the shepherd know the number of his sheep? Does not the Son of David know all his own by name? Might not he make good use of this calculation? What evil has he done, if he do this? *Answer*, It is certain that it was a sin, and a great sin; but where the evil of it lay is not so certain. (1.) Some think the fault was that he numbered those that were under twenty years old if they were but of stature and strength able to bear arms, and that this was the reason why this account was not enrolled, because it was illegal, 1 Chron. xxvii. 23, 24

(2.) Others think the fault was that he did not require the half-shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary whenever the people were numbered, as a *ransom for their souls*, Exod. xxx. 12. (3.) Others think that he did it with a design to impose a tribute upon them for himself, to be put into his treasury, and this by way of poll, so that when he knew their numbers he could tell what it would amount to. But nothing of this appears, nor was David ever a raiser of taxes. (4.) This was the fault, that he had no orders from God to do it, nor was there any occasion for the doing of it. It was a needless trouble both to himself and to his people. (5.) Some think that it was an affront to the ancient promise which God made to Abraham, that his seed should be innumerable as the dust of the earth; it savoured of distrust of that promise, or a design to show that it was not fulfilled in the letter of it. He would number those of whom God had said that they could not be numbered. Those know not what they do that go about to disprove the word of God. (6.) That which was the worst thing in numbering the people was that David did it in the pride of his heart, which was Hezekiah's sin in showing his treasures to the ambassadors. [1.] It was a proud conceit of his own greatness in having the command of so numerous a people, as if their increase, which was to be ascribed purely to the blessing of God, had been owing to any conduct of his own. [2.] It was a proud confidence in his own strength. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear the more formidable, and doubted not that, if he should have any war, he should overpower his enemies with the multitude of his forces, trusting in an arm of flesh more than he should have done who had written so much of trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or at least but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth.

2. The spring from which it is here said to arise is yet more strange, v. 1. It is not strange that *the anger of the Lord should be kindled against Israel*. There was cause enough for it. They were unthankful for the blessings of David's government, and strangely drawn in to take part with Absalom first and afterwards with Sheba. We have reason to think that their peace and plenty made them secure and sensual, and that God was therefore displeased with them. But that, in this displeasure, he should move David to number the people is very strange. We are sure that God is not the author of sin; he tempts no man: we are told (1 Chron. xxi. 1) that *Satan provoked David to number Israel*. Satan, as an enemy, suggested it for a sin, as

he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. God, as righteous Judge, permitted it, with a design, from this sin of David, to take an occasion to punish Israel for others sins, for which he might justly have punished them without this. But, as before he brought a famine upon them for the sin of Saul, so now a pestilence for the sin of David, that princes may from these instances learn, when the judgments of God are abroad, to suspect that their sins are the ground of the controversy, and may therefore repent and reform themselves, which should have a great influence upon national repentance and reformation, and that people may learn to pray for those in authority, that God would keep them from sin, because, if they sin, the kingdom smarts.

II. The opposition which Joab made to these orders. Even he was aware of David's folly and vain-glory in this design. He observed that David gave no reason for it, only, *Number the people, that I may know the number of the people*; and therefore he endeavoured to divert his pride, and in a much more respectful manner than he had before endeavoured to divert his passion upon the death of Absalom; then he spoke rudely and insolently (*ch. xix. 5-7*), but now as became him: *Now the Lord thy God add unto the people a hundred fold, v. 3*. There was no occasion to tax them, nor to enlist them, nor to make any distribution of them. They were all easy and happy; and Joab wished both that their number might increase and that the king, though old, might live to see their increase, and have the satisfaction of it. "*But why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? What need is there of doing it? Pauperis est numerare pecus—Leave it to the poor to count their flocks*. Especially why should David, who speaks so much of delighting in God and the exercises of devotion, and who, being old, one would think, should have put away childish things, take a pleasure (so he calls it modestly, but he means taking pride) in a thing of this nature? Note, Many things, not in themselves sinful, turn into sin to us by our inordinately delighting in them. Joab was aware of David's vanity herein, but he himself was not. It would be good for us to have a friend that would faithfully admonish us when we say or do any thing proud or vain-glorious, for we often do so and are not ourselves aware of it.

III. The orders executed notwithstanding. *The king's word prevailed, v. 4*. He would have it done; Joab must not gainsay it, lest he be thought to grudge his time and pains in the king's service. It is an unhappiness to great men to have those about them that will aid them and serve them in that which is evil. Joab, according to order, applied himself with some reluctance to this unpleasant task, and took the captains of the host to help him. They began in the most distant places, in the east first, on the other

side Jordan (v. 5), then they went towards Dan in the north (v. 6), so to Tyre on the east, and thence to Beersheba in the south, v. 7. Above nine months were spent in taking this account, a great deal of trouble and amazement were occasioned by it in the country (v. 8), and the sum total was, at length, brought to the king at Jerusalem, v. 9. Whether the numbers answered David's expectation or no we are not told, nor whether the account fed his pride or mortified it. The people were very many, but, it may be, not so many as he thought they were. They had not increased in Canaan as they had in Egypt, nor were much more than double to what they were when they came into Canaan under Joshua, about 400 years before; yet it is an evidence that Canaan was a very fruitful land that so many thousands were maintained within so narrow a compass.

10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 11 For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 13 So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. 14 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us now fall into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. 15 So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. 16 And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand.

And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. 17 And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

We have here David repenting of the sin and yet punished for it, God repenting of the judgment and David thereby made more penitent.

1. Here is David's penitent reflection upon and confession of his sin in numbering the people. While the thing was in doing, during all those nine months, we do not find that David was sensible of his sin, for had he been so he would have countermanded the orders he had given; but, when the account was finished and laid before him, that very night his conscience was awakened, and he felt the pain of it just then when he promised himself the pleasure of it. When he was about to feast on the satisfaction of the number of his people, it was turned into the gall of asps within him; sense of the sin cast a damp upon the joy, v. 10. 1. He was convinced of his sin: *His heart smote him* before the prophet came to him (I think it should not be read *for* (v. 11), but *and when David was up*, so it is in the original), his conscience showed him the evil of what he had done; now that appeared sin, and exceedingly sinful, which before he saw no harm in. He reflected upon it with great regret and his heart reproached him for it. Note, It is a good thing, when a man has sinned, to have a heart within him to smite him for it; it is a good sign of a principle of grace in the heart, and a good step towards repentance and reformation. 2. He confessed it to God and begged earnestly for the forgiveness of it. (1.) He owned that he had sinned, sinned greatly, though to others it might seem no sin at all, or a very little one. True penitents, whose consciences are tender and well informed, see that evil in sin which others do not see. (2.) He owned that he had *done foolishly, very foolishly*, because he had done it in the pride of his heart; and it was folly for him to be proud of the numbers of his people, when they were God's people, not his, and, as many as they were, God could soon make them fewer. (3.) He cried to God for pardon: *I beseech thee, O Lord! take away the iniquity of thy servant. If we confess our sins, we may pray in faith that God will forgive them, and take away, by pardoning mercy, that iniquity which we cast away by sincere repentance.*

11. The just and necessary correction which he suffered for this sin. David had been full of tossings to and fro all night under the sense of his sin, having no rest in his bones

because of it, *and he arose in the morning* expecting to hear of God's displeasure against him for what he had done, or designing to speak with Gad his seer concerning it. Gad is called his *seer* because he had him always at hand to advise with in the things of God, and made use of him as his confessor and counsellor; but God prevented him, and directed the prophet Gad what to say to him (v. 11), and,

1. Three things are taken for granted, (1.) That David must be corrected for his fault. It is too great a crime, and reflects too much dishonour upon God, to go unpunished, even in David himself. Of the seven things that God hates, pride is the first, Prov. vi. 17. Note, Those who truly repent of their sins, and have them pardoned, are yet often made to smart for them in this world. (2.) The punishment must answer to the sin. He was proud of the numbers of his people, and therefore the judgment he must be chastised with for this sin must be such as will make them fewer. Note, What we make the matter of our pride it is just with God to take from us, or embitter to us, and, some way or other, to make the matter of our punishment. (3.) It must be such a punishment as the people must have a large share in, *for God's anger was kindled against Israel, v. 1.* Though it was David's sin that immediately opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge.

2. As to the punishment that must be inflicted,

(1.) David is told to choose what rod he will be beaten with, v. 12, 13. His heavenly Father must correct him, but, to show that he does not do it willingly, he gives David leave to make choice whether it shall be by war, famine, or pestilence, three sore judgments, which greatly weaken and diminish a people. God, by putting him thus to his choice, designed, [1.] To humble him the more for his sin, which he would see to be exceedingly sinful when he came to consider each of these judgments as exceedingly dreadful. Or, [2.] To upbraid him with the proud conceit he had of his own sovereignty over Israel. He that is so great a prince begins to think he may have what he will. "Come then," says God, "which wilt thou have of these three things?" Compare Jer. xxxiv. 17, *I proclaim a liberty for you, but it is such a liberty as this of David's, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine;* and Jer. xv. 2, *Such as are for death to death.* Or, [3.] To give him some encouragement under the correction, letting him know that God did not cast him out of communion with himself, but that still his secret was with him, and in afflicting him he considered his frame and what he could best bear. Or, [4.] That he might the more patiently bear the rod when it was a rod of his own choosing. The prophet bids him advise with himself, and then tell him what answer he should re-

turn to him that sent him. Note, Ministers are sent of God to us, and they must give an account of the success of their embassy. It concerns us therefore to consider what answer they shall return from us, that they may give up their account of us with joy.

(2.) He objects only against the judgments of the sword, and, for the other two, he refers the matter to God, but intimates his choice of the pestilence rather (v. 14): *I am in a great strait;* and well he might be *when fear, and the pit, and the snare, were before him,* and, if he escape one, he must inevitably fall into the other, Jer. xlviii. 43, 44. Note, Sin brings men into straits; wise and good men often distress themselves by their own folly. [1.] He begs that he may *not fall into the hand of man.* "Whatever comes, *let us not flee three months before our enemies;*" this would sully all the glory of David's triumphs and give occasion to the enemies of God and Israel to *behave themselves proudly.* See Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. "Their tender mercies are cruel; and in three months they will do that damage to the nation which many years will not repair." But, [2.] He casts himself upon God: *Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great.* Men are *God's hand* (so they are called, Ps. xvii. 14, the sword of his sending), yet there are some judgments which come more immediately from his hand than others, as famine and pestilence, and David refers it to God which of these shall be the scourge, and God chooses the shortest, that he may the sooner testify his being reconciled. But some think that David, by these words, intimates his choice of the pestilence. The land had not yet recovered the famine under which it smarted three years upon the Gibeonites' account, and therefore, "Let us not be corrected with that rod, for that also will be the triumph of our neighbours," hence we read of the *reproach of famine* (Ezek. xxxvi. 30); "but, if Israel must be diminished, let it be by the pestilence, for that is *falling into the hands of the Lord,*" who usually inflicted that judgment by the hand of his own immediate servants, the angels, as in the death of the first-born of Egypt. That is a judgment to which David himself, and his own family, lie as open as the meanest subject, but not so either to famine or sword, and therefore David, tenderly conscious of his guilt, chooses that. Sword and famine will devour one as well as another, but, it may be thought, the destroying angel will draw his sword against those who are known to God to be most guilty. This will be of the shortest continuance, and he dreads the thought of lying long under the tokens of God's displeasure. *It is a dreadful thing,* the apostle says, *to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. x. 31), a fearful thing indeed for sinners that have, by their impenitency, shut themselves out from all hope of his mercy. But David, a penitent, dares cast himself into

God's hand, knowing he shall find that *his mercies are great*. Good men, even when they are under God's frowns, yet will entertain no other than good thoughts of him. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

(3.) A pestilence is accordingly sent (v. 15), which, for the extent of it, spread from Dan to Beersheba, from one end of the kingdom to the other, which showed it to come immediately from God's hand and not from any natural causes. David has his choice; he suffers by miracle, and not by ordinary means. For the continuance of it, it lasted from morning (this very morning on which it was put to David's choice) to the time appointed, that is, to the third day (so Mr. Poole), or only to the evening of the first day, the time appointed for the evening sacrifice, so bishop Patrick and others, who reckon that the pestilence lasted but nine hours, and that, in compassion to David, God shortened the time he had first mentioned. The execution the pestilence did was very severe. *There died 70,000 men*, that were all well, and sick, and dead, in a few hours. What a great cry, may we suppose, was there now throughout all the land of Israel, as there was in Egypt when the first-born were slain! but that was at midnight, this in the daytime, Ps. xci. 6. See the power of the angels, when God gives them commission, either to save or to destroy. Joab is nine months in passing with his pen, the angel but nine hours in passing with his sword, through all the coasts and corners of the land of Israel. See how easily God can bring down the proudest sinners, and how much we owe daily to the divine patience. David's adultery is punished, for the present, only with the death of one infant, his pride with the death of all those thousands, so much does God hate pride. The number slain amounted to almost half a decimation, 70,000 being about one in twenty. Now, we may suppose, David's flesh trembled for fear of God and he was afraid of his judgments, Ps. cxix. 120.

III. God's gracious relaxation of the judgment, when it began to be inflicted upon Jerusalem (v. 16): *The angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem*, as if he intended to do greater execution there than any where else, even to destroy it. The country had drunk of the bitter cup, but Jerusalem must drink the dregs. It should seem that was last numbered, and therefore was reserved to be last plagued; perhaps there was more wickedness, especially more pride (and that was the sin now chastised), in Jerusalem than elsewhere, therefore the hand of the destroyer is stretched out upon that; but then *the Lord repented him of the evil*, changed not his mind, but his way, and said to the destroying angel, *It is enough; stay now thy hand, and let mercy rejoice against judgment*. Jerusalem shall be spared for the ark's sake, for it is the place God hath chosen to put his

name there. See here how ready God is to forgive and how little pleasure he takes in punishing; and let it encourage us to meet him by repentance in the way of his judgments. This was on Mount Moriah. Dr. Lightfoot observes that in the very place where Abraham, by a countermand from heaven, was stayed from slaying his son, this angel, by a like countermand, was stayed from destroying Jerusalem. It is for the sake of the great sacrifice that our forfeited lives are preserved from the destroying angel.

IV. David's renewed repentance for his sin upon this occasion, v. 17. He saw the angel (God opening his eyes for that purpose), saw his sword stretched out to destroy, a flaming sword, saw him ready to sheath it upon the orders given him to stay proceedings; seeing all this, he spoke, not to the angel (he knew better than to address himself to the servant in the presence of the Master, or to give that honour to the creature which is the Creator's due), but to the Lord, and said, *Lo, I have sinned*. Note, True penitents, the more they perceive of God's sparing pardoning mercy the more humbled they are for sin and the more resolved against it. They shall be ashamed when I am pacified towards them, Ezek. xvi. 63. Observe, 1. How he crimiates himself, as if he could never speak ill enough of his own fault: *"I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; mine is the crime, and therefore on me be the cross. Let thy hand be against me, and my father's house.* I am the sinner, let me be the sufferer;" so willing was he to accept the punishment of his iniquity, though he was worth 10,000 of them. 2. How he intercedes for the people, whose bitter lamentations made his heart to ache, and his ears to tingle: *These sheep, what have they done? Done! Why they had done much amiss; it was their sin that provoked God to leave David to himself to do as he did; yet, as becomes a penitent, he is severe upon his own faults, while he extenuates theirs.* Most people, when God's judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, and care not who falls by them, so they can escape. But David's penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected. Let this remind us of the grace of our Lord Jesus, who gave himself for our sins and was willing that God's hand should be against him, that we might escape. The shepherd was smitten that the sheep might be spared.

18 And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite. 19 And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. 20 And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants



coming on toward him : and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. 21 And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant ? And David said, To buy the threshing-floor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people. 22 And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him : behold, *here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.* 23 All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee. 24 And the king said unto Araunah, Nay ; but I will surely buy *it* of thee at a price : neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

Here is, I. A command sent to David to erect an altar in the place where he saw the angel, v. 18. This was to intimate to David, 1. That, upon his repeated submission and humiliation, God was now thoroughly reconciled to him ; for, *if the Lord had been pleased to kill him, he would not have accepted an offering*, and therefore would not have ordered him to *build an altar*. God's encouraging us to offer to him spiritual sacrifices is a comfortable evidence of his reconciling us to himself. 2. That peace is made between God and sinners by sacrifice, and not otherwise, even by Christ the great propitiation, of whom all the legal sacrifices were types. It is for his sake that the destroying angel is told to stay his hand. 3. That when God's judgments are graciously stayed we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness to his praise. This altar was to be for thank-offerings. See Isa. xii. 1.

II. The purchase which David made of the ground in order hereunto. It seems the owner was a Jebusite, Araunah by name, proselyted no doubt to the Jewish religion, though by birth a Gentile, and therefore allowed, not only to dwell among the Israelites, but to have a possession of his own in a city, Lev. xxv. 29, 30. The piece of ground

was a threshing-floor, a mean place, yet thus dignified—a place of labour, therefore thus dignified. Now,

1. David went in person to the owner, to treat with him. See his justice, that he would not so much as use this place in the present exigence, though the proprietor was an alien, though he himself was a king, and though he had express orders from God to rear an altar there, till he had bought it and paid for it. *God hates robbery for burnt-offering*. See his humility, how far he was from taking state ; though a king, he was now a penitent, and therefore, in token of his self-abasement, he neither sent for Araunah to come to him nor sent another to deal with him, but went himself (v. 19), and, though it looked like a diminution of himself, he lost no honour by it. Araunah, when he saw him, went and bowed himself to the ground before him, v. 20. Great men will never be the less respected for their humility, but the more.

2. Araunah, when he understood his business (v. 21), generously offered him, not only the ground to build his altar on, but *oxen for sacrifices*, and other things that might be of use to him in the service (v. 22), and all this *gratis*, and a good prayer into the bargain : *The Lord thy God accept thee !* This he did, (1.) Because he had a generous spirit with a great estate. *He gave as a king* (v. 23) ; though an ordinary subject, he had the spirit of a prince. In the Hebrew it is, *He gave, even the king to the king*, whence it is supposed that Araunah had been king of the Jebusites in that place, or was descended from their royal family, though now a tributary to David. (2.) Because he highly esteemed David, though his conqueror, upon the score of his personal merits, and never thought he could do too much to oblige him. (3.) Because he had an affection for Israel, and earnestly desired that *the plague might be stayed* ; and the honour of its being stayed at *his threshing-floor* he would account a valuable consideration for all he now tendered to David.

3. David resolved to pay the full value of it, and did so, v. 24. Here were two generous souls well met. Araunah is very willing to give ; but David is determined to buy, and for a good reason : he will not offer that to God which costs him nothing. He would not take advantage of the pious Jebusite's generosity. He thanked him, no doubt, for his kind offer, but paid him *fifty shekels of silver* for the floor and the oxen for the present service, and afterwards 600 shekels of gold for the ground adjoining, to build the temple on. Note, Those know not what religion is whose chief care it is to make it cheap and easy to themselves, and who are best pleased with that which costs them least pains or money. What have we our substance for but to honour God with it ? and how can it be better bestowed ?

III. The building of the altar, and the

offering of the proper sacrifices upon it (v. 25), burnt-offerings to the glory of God's justice in the execution that had been done, and peace-offerings to the glory of his mercy in the seasonable staying of the process. Hereupon God showed (it is supposed by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifices) that he was entreated for the land, and that it was

in mercy that the plague was removed and in token of God's being reconciled both to prince and people. Christ is our altar, our sacrifice: in him alone we may expect to find favour with God, to escape his wrath, and the sword, the flaming sword, of the cherubim who keep the way of the tree of life.

AN

# EXPOSITION,

## WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE FIRST BOOK OF

# K I N G S.

MANY histories are books of kings and their reigns, to which the affairs of their kingdoms are reduced; this is a piece of honour that has commonly been paid to crowned heads. The holy Scripture is the history of the kingdom of God among men, under the several administrations of it; but there the King is one and his name one. The particular history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the kingdom of God among them; for still it is a sacred history, much more instructive and not less entertaining than any of the histories of the kings of the earth, to which (those of them that are of any certainty) it is prior in time; for though there were kings in Edom before there was any king in Israel, Gen. xxxvi. 31 (foreigners, in that point of state, got the precedency), yet the history of the kings of Israel lives, and will live, in holy Writ, to the end of the world, whereas that of the kings of Edom is long since buried in oblivion; for the honour that comes from God is durable, while the honour of the world is like a mushroom, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night.—The Bible began with the story of patriarchs, and prophets, and judges, men whose converse with heaven was more immediate, the record of which strengthens our faith, but is not so easily accommodated to our case, now that we expect not visions, as the subsequent history of affairs like ours under the direction of common providence; and here also we find, though not many types and figures of the Messiah, yet great expectations of him; for not only prophets, but kings, desired to see the great mysteries of the gospel, Luke x. 24.—The two books of Samuel are introductions to the books of the Kings, as they relate the origin of the royal government in Saul and of the royal family in David. These two books give us an account of David's successor, Solomon, the division of his kingdom, and the succession of the several kings both of Judah and Israel, with an abstract of their history down to the captivity. And as from the book of Genesis we may collect excellent rules of economics, for the good governing of families, so from these books we may collect rules of politics, for the directing of public affairs. There is in these books special regard had to the house and lineage of David, from which Christ came. Some of his sons trod in his steps, and others did not. The characters of the kings of Judah may be thus briefly given:—David the devout, Solomon the wise, Rehoboam the simple, Abijah the valiant, Asa the upright, Jehoshaphat the religious, Jehoram the wicked, Ahaziah the profane, Joash the backslider, Amaziah the rash, Uzziah the mighty, Jotham the peaceable, Ahaz the idolater, Hezekiah the reformer, Manasseh the penitent, Amon the obscure, Josiah the tender-hearted, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, all wicked, and such as brought ruin quickly on themselves and their kingdom. The number of the good and had is nearly equal, but the reigns of the good were generally long and those of the bad short, the consideration of which will make the state of Israel not altogether so bad in this period as at first it seems. In this first book we have, I. The death of David, *ch.* i. and ii. II. The glorious reign of Solomon, and his building the temple (*ch.* iii.—x.), but the cloud his sun set under, *ch.* xi. III. The division of the kingdoms in Rehoboam, and his reign and Jeroboam's, *ch.* xii.—xiv. IV. The reigns of Abijah and Asa over Judah, Baasha and Omri over Israel, *ch.* xv. and xvi. V. Elijah's miracles, *ch.* xvii.—xix. VI. Ahab's success against Benhadad, his wickedness and fall, *ch.* xx.—xxii. And in all this history it appears that kings, though gods to us, are men to God, mortal and accountable.

## CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, I. David declining in his health, ver. 1—4. II. Adonijah aspiring to the kingdom, and treating his party, in order to it, ver. 5—10. III. Nathan and Bathsheba contriving to secure the succession to Solomon, and prevailing for an order from David for that purpose, ver. 11—31. IV. The anointing of Solomon accordingly, and the people's joy therein, ver. 32—40. V. The effectual stop this put to Adonijah's usurpation, and the dispersion of his party thereupon, ver. 41—49. VI. Solomon's dismissal of Adonijah upon his good behaviour, ver. 50—53.

**N**OW king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. 2 Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3 So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him; but the king knew her not.

David, as recorded in the foregoing chapter, had, by the great mercy of God, escaped the sword of the destroying angel. But our deliverances from or through diseases and dangers are but reprieves; if the candle be not blown out, it will burn out of itself. We have David here sinking under the infirmities of old age, and brought by them to the gates of the grave. *He that cometh up out of the pit shall fall into the snare; and, one way or other, we must needs die.* 1. It would have troubled one to see David so infirm. He was old, and his natural heat so wasted that no clothes could keep him warm, *v. 1.* David had been a valiant active man and a man of business, and very vehement had the flame always been in his breast; and yet now his blood is chilled and stagnated, he is confined to his bed, and there can get no heat. He was now seventy years old. Many, at that age, are as lively and fit for business as ever: but David was now chastised for his former sins, especially that in the matter of Uriah, and felt from his former toils and the hardships he had gone through in his youth, which then he made nothing of, but was now the worse for. *Let not the strong man glory in his strength,* which may soon be weakened by sickness, or at last will be weakened by old age. Let young people remember their Creator in the days of their youth, before these evil days come. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do with all our might, because the night comes, the night of old age, in which no man can work; and, when our strength has gone, it will be a comfort to remember that we used it well. 2. It would have troubled one to see his physicians so weak and unskilful that they knew no other

way of relieving him than by outward applications. No cordials, no spirits, but, (1.) *They covered him with clothes,* which, where there is any inward heat, will keep it in, and so increase it; but, where it is not, they have none to communicate, no, not royal clothing. Elihu makes it a difficulty to understand *how our garments are warm upon us* (Job xxxvii. 17); but, if God deny his blessing, men *clothe themselves, and there is none warm* (Hag. i. 6), David here was not. (2.) They foolishly prescribed nuptials to one that should rather have been preparing for his funeral (*v. 2—4*); but they knew what would gratify their own corruptions, and perhaps were too willing to gratify his, under colour of consulting his health. His prophets should have been consulted as well as his physicians in an affair of this nature. However, this might be excused then, when even good men ignorantly allowed themselves to have many wives. We now have not so learned of Christ, but are taught that one man must have but one wife (Matt. xix. 5), and further that *it is good for a man not to touch a woman*, 1 Cor. vii. 1. That Abishag was married to David before she lay with him, and was his secondary wife, appears from its being imputed as a great crime to Adonijah that he desired to marry her (*ch. ii. 22*) after his father's death.

5 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6 And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom. 7 And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah. 9 And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants: 10 But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.

David had much affliction in his children. Amnon and Absalom had both been his grief; the one his first-born, the other his third, 2 Sam. iii. 2, 3. His second, whom

he had by Abigail, we will suppose he had comfort in; his fourth was Adonijah (2 Sam. iii. 4); he was one of those that were born in Hebron; we have heard nothing of him till now, and here we are told that he was a comely person, and that he was next in age, and (as it proved) next in temper, to Absalom, v. 6. And, further, that in his father's eyes he had been a jewel, but was now a thorn.

I. His father had made a fondling of him, r. 6. He had not displeased him at any time. It is not said that he never displeased his father; it is probable that he had done so frequently, and his father was secretly troubled at his misconduct and lamented it before God. But his father had not displeased him, by crossing him in his humours, denying him any thing he had a mind to, or by calling him to an account as to what he had done and where he had been, or by keeping him to his book or his business, or reproving him for what he saw or heard of that he did amiss; he never said to him, *Why hast thou done so?* because he saw it was uneasy to him, and he could not bear it without fretting. It was the son's fault that he was displeased at reproof and took it for an affront, whereby he lost the benefit of it; and it was the father's fault that, because he saw it displeased him, he did not reprove him; and now he justly smarted for indulging him. Those who honour their sons more than God, as those do who keep them not under good discipline, thereby forfeit the honour they might expect from their sons.

II. He, in return, made a fool of his father. Because he was old, and confined to his bed, he thought no notice was to be taken of him, and therefore *exalted himself*, and said, *I will be king*, v. 5. Children that are indulged learn to be proud and ambitious, which is the ruin of a great many young people. The way to keep them humble is to keep them under. Observe Adonijah's insolence, 1. He looked upon the days of mourning for his father to be at hand, and therefore he prepared to succeed him, though he knew that by the designation both of God and David Solomon was to be the man; for public notice had been given of it by David himself, and the succession settled, as it were by act of parliament, in pursuance of God's appointment, 1 Chron. xxii. 9; xxiii. 1. This entail Adonijah attempted by force to cut off, in contempt both of God and his father. Thus is the kingdom of Christ opposed, and there are those that say, "We will not have him to reign over us." 2. He looked upon his father as superannuated and good for nothing, and therefore he entered immediately upon the possession of the throne. He cannot wait till his father's head be laid low, but it must now be said, *Adonijah reigns* (r. 18), and, *God save king Adonijah*, v. 25. His father is not fit to govern, for he is old and past ruling; nor Solomon, for he is

young, and not yet able to rule; and therefore Adonijah will take the government upon him. It argues a very base and wicked mind for children to insult over their parents because of the infirmities of their age. 3. In pursuance of this ambitious project, (1.) He got a great retinue (r. 5), *chariots and horsemen*, both for state and strength, to wait on him, and to fight for him. (2.) He made great interest with no less than Joab, the general of the army, and Abiathar the high priest, v. 7. That he should make his court to those who by their influence in church and camp were capable of doing him great service is not strange; but we may well wonder by what arts they could be drawn to follow him and help him. They were old men, who had been faithful to David in the most difficult and troublesome of his times, men of sense and experience, who, one would think, would not easily be wheedled. They could not propose any advantage to themselves by supporting Adonijah, for they were both at the top of their preferment and stood fast in it. They could not be ignorant of the entail of the crown upon Solomon, which it was not in their power to cut off, and therefore it was their interest to oblige him. But God, in this matter, left them to themselves, perhaps to correct them for some former misconduct with a scourge of their own making. We are told (v. 8) who those were that were of such approved fidelity to David that Adonijah had not the confidence so much as to propose his project to them—Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. A man that has given proofs of his resolute adherence to that which is good shall not be asked to do a bad thing. (3.) He prepared a great entertainment (v. 9) at En-rogel, not far from Jerusalem; his guests were the king's sons, and the king's servants, whom he feasted and carressed to bring them over to his party; but Solomon was not invited, either because he despised him or because he despaired of him, v. 10. Such as serve their own belly, and will be in the interest of those that will feast them what side soever they are of, are an easy prey to seducers, Rom. xvi. 18. Some think that Adonijah slew these sheep and oxen, even fat ones, for sacrifice, and that it was a religious feast he made, beginning his usurpation with a show of devotion, as Absalom under the colour of a vow (2 Sam. xv. 7), which he might do the more plausibly when he had the high priest himself on his side. It is a pity that any occasion should ever be given to say, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*—*In the name of the Lord begins all evil*, and that all religious exercises should be made to patronise all religious practices.

11 Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth

*it* not? 12 Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 13 Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 14 Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words. 15 And Bathsheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king. 16 And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? 17 And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, *saying*, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. 18 And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth: and now, my lord the king, thou knowest *it* not: 19 And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. 20 And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel *are* upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders. 22 And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23 And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24 And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? 25 For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen and fat cattle and

sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. 26 But me, *even* me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called. 27 Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not showed *it* unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him? 28 Then king David answered and said, Call me Bathsheba. And she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. 29 And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, 30 Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day. 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.

We have here the effectual endeavours that were used by Nathan and Bathsheba to obtain from David a ratification of Solomon's succession, for the crushing of Adonijah's usurpation. 1. David himself knew not what was doing. Disobedient children think that they are well enough off if they can but keep their good old parents ignorant of their bad courses; but a *bird of the air will carry the voice*. 2. Bathsheba lived retired, and knew nothing of it either, till Nathan informed her. Many get very comfortably through this world that know little how the world goes. 3. Solomon, it is likely, knew of it, but was as a deaf man that heard not. Though he had years, and wisdom above his years, yet we do not find that he stirred to oppose Adonijah, but quietly composed himself and left it to God and his friends to order the matter. Hence David, in his Psalm for Solomon, observes that while men, in pursuit of the world, in vain *rise early and sit up late*, God *giveth his beloved* (his *Jedidiahs*) *sleep*, in giving them to be easy, and to gain their point without agitation, Ps. cxxvii. 1, 2. How then is the design brought about?

1. Nathan the prophet alarms Bathsheba by acquainting her with the case, and puts her in a way to get an order from the king for the confirming of Solomon's title. He was concerned, because he knew God's mind,

and David's and Israel's interest; it was by him that God had named Solomon *Jedidiah* (2 Sam. xii. 25), and therefore he could not sit still and see the throne usurped, which he knew was Solomon's right by the will of him from whom promotion cometh. When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from heaven, no marvel that prophets were so much interested and employed in that matter; but now that common providence rules the affairs of the kingdom of men (Dan. iv. 32) the subordinate agency must be left to common persons, and let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men. Nathan applied to Bathsheba, as one that had the greatest concern for Solomon, and could have the freest access to David. He informed her of Adonijah's attempt (v. 11), and that it was not with David's consent or knowledge. He suggested to her that not only Solomon was in danger of losing the crown, but that he and she too were in danger of losing their lives if Adonijah prevailed. A humble spirit may be indifferent to a crown, and may be content, notwithstanding the prospect of it, to sit down short of the possession of it. But the law of self-preservation, and the sixth commandment, obliges us to use all possible endeavours to secure our own life and the life of others. Now, says Nathan, let me give thee counsel how to save thy own life and the life of thy son, v. 12. Such as this is the counsel that Christ's ministers give us in his name, to give all diligence, not only that no man take our crown (Rev. iii. 11), but that we save our lives, even the lives of our souls. He directs her (v. 13) to go to the king, to remind him of his word and oath, that Solomon should be his successor; and to ask him in the most humble manner, *Why doth Adonijah reign?* He thought David was not so cold but this would warm him. Conscience, as well as a sense of honour, would put life into him upon such an occasion as this; and he promised (v. 14) that, while she was reasoning with the king upon this matter, he would come in and second her, as if he came accidentally, which perhaps the king might look upon as a special providence (and he was one that took notice of such evidences, 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33), or, at least, it would help to awaken him so much the more.

II. Bathsheba, according to Nathan's advice and direction, loses no time, but immediately makes her application to the king, on the same errand on which Esther came to king Ahasuerus, to intercede for her life. She needed not wait for a call as Esther did, she knew she should be welcome at any time; but it is remarked that when she visited the king Abishag was ministering to him (v. 15), and Bathsheba took no displeasure either at him or her for it, also that she bowed and did obeisance to the king (v. 16), in token of her respect to him both as her

prince and as her husband; such a genuine daughter was she of Sarah, who obeyed Abraham, calling him *lord*. Those that would find favour with superiors must show them reverence, and be dutiful to those whom they expect to be kind to them. Her address to the king, on this occasion, is very discreet. 1. She reminded him of his promise made to her, and confirmed with a solemn oath, that Solomon should succeed him, v. 17. She knew how fast this would hold such a conscientious man as David was. 2. She informed him of Adonijah's attempt, which he was ignorant of (v. 18): "Adonijah reigns, in competition with thee for the present and in contradiction to thy promise for the future. The fault is not thine, for thou knewest it not; but now that thou knowest it thou wilt, in pursuance of thy promise, take care to suppress this usurpation." She told him who were Adonijah's guests, and who were in his interest, and added, but "*Solomon thy servant has he not called*, which plainly shows he looks upon him as his rival, and aims to undermine him, v. 19. It is not an oversight, but a contempt of the act of settlement, that Solomon is neglected." 3. She pleads that it is very much in his power to obviate this mischief (v. 20): *The eyes of all Israel are upon thee*, not only as a king, for we cannot suppose it the prerogative of any prince to bequeath his subjects by will (as if they were his goods and chattels) to whom he pleases, but as a prophet. All Israel knew that David was not only himself the anointed of the God of Jacob, but that the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him (2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2), and therefore waiting for and depending upon a divine designation, in a matter of such importance, David's word would be an oracle and a law to them; this therefore (says Bathsheba) they expect, and it will end the controversy and effectually quash all Adonijah's pretensions. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*. Note, Whatever power, interest, or influence, men have, they ought to improve it to the utmost for the preserving and advancing of the kingdom of the Messiah, of which Solomon's kingdom was a type. 4. She suggested the imminent peril which she and her son would be in if this matter was not settled in David's life-time, v. 21. "If Adonijah prevail, as he is likely to do (having Joab the general and Abiathar the priest on his side) unless speedily suppressed, Solomon and all his friends will be looked upon as traitors and dealt with accordingly." Usurpers are most cruel. If Adonijah had got into the throne, he would not have dealt so fairly with Solomon as Solomon did with him. Those hazard every thing who stand in the way of such as against right force their entrance.

III. Nathan the prophet, according to his promise, seasonably stepped in, and seconded her, while she was speaking, before the king

had given his answer, lest, if he had heard Bathsheba's representation only, his answer should be dilatory and only that he would consider of it: but out of the mouth of two witnesses, two such witnesses, the word would be established, and he would immediately give positive orders. The king is told that Nathan the prophet has come, and he is sure to be always welcome to the king, especially when either he is not well or has any great affair upon his thoughts; for, in either case, a prophet will be, in a particular manner, serviceable to him. Nathan knows he must render honour to whom honour is due, and therefore pays the king the same respect now that he finds him sick in bed as he would have done if he had found him in his throne: He bowed himself with his face to the ground, v. 23. He deals a little more plainly with the king than Bathsheba had done. In this his character would support him, and the present languor of the king's spirits made it necessary that they should be roused. 1. He makes the same representation of Adonijah's attempt as Bathsheba had made (v. 25, 26), adding that his party had already got to such a height of assurance as to shout, *God save king Adonijah*, as if king David were already dead, taking notice also that they had not invited him to their feast (*Me thy servant has he not called*), thereby intimating that they resolved not to consult either God or David in the matter, for Nathan was *secretioribus consiliis—intimately acquainted with the mind of both*. 2. He makes David sensible how much he was concerned to clear himself from having a hand in it: *Hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me?* (v. 24), and again (v. 27), "*Is this thing done by my lord the king?*" If it be, he is not so faithful either to God's word or to his own as we all took him to be; if it be not, it is high time that we witness against the usurpation, and declare Solomon his successor. If it be, why is not Nathan made acquainted with it, who is not only, in general, the king's confidant, but is particularly concerned in this matter, having been employed to notify to David the mind of God concerning the succession; but, if my lord the king knows nothing of the matter (as certainly he does not), what daring insolence are Adonijah and his party guilty of!" Thus he endeavoured to incense David against them, that he might act the more vigorously for the support of Solomon's interest. Note, Good men would do their duty if they were reminded of it, and put upon it, and told what occasion there is for them to appear; and those who thus are their remembrancers do them a real kindness, as Nathan here did to David.

IV. David, hereupon, made a solemn declaration of his firm adherence to his former resolution, that Solomon should be his successor. Bathsheba is called in (v. 28), and to her, as acting for and on behalf of her son,

the king gives these fresh assurances. 1. He repeats his former promise and oath owns that he had *sworn unto her by the Lord God of Israel that Solomon should reign after him*, v. 30. Though he is old, and his memory begins to fail him, yet he remembers this. Note, An oath is so sacred a thing that the obligations of it cannot be broken, and so solemn a thing that the impressions of it, one would think, cannot be forgotten. 2. He ratifies it with another, because the occasion called for it: *As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even so will I certainly do this day*, without dispute, without delay. His form of swearing seems to be what he commonly used on solemn occasions, for we find it, 2 Sam. iv. 9. And it carries in it a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him, in bringing him safely through the many difficulties and hardships which had lain in his way, and which he now makes mention of to the glory of God (as Jacob, when he lay a dying, Gen. xlviii. 16), thus setting to his seal, from his own experience, that that was true which the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him. Ps. xxxiv. 22, *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants*. Dying saints ought to be witnesses for God, and speak of him as they have found. Perhaps he speaks thus, on this occasion, for the encouragement of his son and successor to trust in God in the distresses he also might meet with.

V. Bathsheba receives these assurances (v. 31), 1. With great complaisance to the king's person; she did reverence to him, while Adonijah and his party affronted him. 2. With hearty good wishes for the king's health: *Let him live*. So far was she from thinking that he lived too long that she prayed he might live for ever, if it were possible, to adorn the crown he wore and to be a blessing to his people. We should earnestly desire the prolonging of useful lives, however it may be the postponing of any advantages of our own.

32 And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. 33 The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: 34 And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon. 35 Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler

over Israel and over Judah. 36 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen : the LORD God of my lord the king say so *too*. 37 As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David. 38 So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. 39 And Zadok the priest took a horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon. 40 And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

We have here the effectual care David took both to secure Solomon's right and to preserve the public peace, by crushing Adonijah's project in the bud. Observe,

I. The express orders he gave for the proclaiming of Solomon. The persons he entrusted with this great affair were Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, men of power and interest whom David had always reposed a confidence in and found faithful to him, and whom Adonijah had passed by in his invitation, *v.* 10. David orders them forthwith, with all possible solemnity, to proclaim Solomon. They must take with them *the servants of their lord*, the life-guards, and all the servants of the household. They must set Solomon on the mule the king used to ride, for he kept not such stables of horses as his son afterwards did. He appoints them whither to go (*v.* 33 and *v.* 34, 35), and what to do. 1. Zadok and Nathan, the two ecclesiastical persons, must, in God's name, anoint him king; for though he was not the first of his family, as Saul and David were, yet he was a younger son, was made king by divine appointment, and his title was contested, which made it necessary that hereby it should be settled. This unction was typical of the designation and qualification of the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one, on whom the Spirit, that oil of gladness, was poured without measure, Heb. i. 9; Ps. lxxxix. 20. And all real Christians, being *heirs of the kingdom* (Jam. ii. 5), do from him receive the anointing, 1 John ii. 27. 2. The great officers, civil and military, are ordered to give public notice of this, and to express the public joy upon this occasion by sound of

trumpet, by which the law of Moses directed the gracing of great solemnities; to this must be added the acclamations of the people: "*Let king Solomon live, let him prosper, let his kingdom be established and perpetuated, and let him long continue in the enjoyment of it;*" so it had been promised concerning him. Ps. lxxii. 15, *He shall live.* 3. They must then bring him in state to the city of David, and he must sit upon the throne of his father, as his substitute now, or viceroy, to despatch public business during his weakness and be his successor after his death: *He shall be king in my stead.* It would be a great satisfaction to David himself, and to all parties concerned, to have this done immediately, that upon the demise of the king there might be no dispute, or agitation, in the public affairs. David was far from grudging his successor the honour of appearing such in his life-time, and yet perhaps was so taken up with his devotions on his sick-bed that, if he had not been put in mind of it by others, this great good work, which was so necessary to the public repose, would have been left undone.

II. The great satisfaction which Benaiah, in the name of the rest, professed in these orders. The king said, "Solomon shall reign for me, and reign after me." "Amen" (says Benaiah heartily); "as the king says, so say we; we are entirely satisfied in the nomination, and concur in the choice; we give our vote for Solomon, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, and since we can bring nothing to pass, much less establish it, without the concurrence of a propitious providence, *The Lord God of my lord the king say so too!*" *v.* 36. This is the language of his faith in that promise of God on which Solomon's government was founded. If we say as God says in his word, we may hope that he will say as we say by his providence. To this he adds a prayer for Solomon (*v.* 37), that God would be with him as he had been with David, and make his throne greater. He knew David was not one of those that envy their children's greatness, and that therefore he would not be disquieted at this prayer, nor take it as an affront, but would heartily say *Amen* to it. The wisest and best man in the world desires his children may be wiser and better than he, for he himself desires to be wiser and better than he is; and wisdom and goodness are true greatness.

III. The immediate execution of these orders, *v.* 38—40. No time was lost, but Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed, and there Zadok (who, though he was not as yet high priest, was, we may suppose, the suffragan, the Jews called him the *sagan*, or second priest) anointed him by the direction of Nathan the prophet and David the king, *v.* 39. In the tabernacle, where the ark was now lodged, was kept, among other sacred things, the holy oil for many religious services; thence Zadok took a *horn*



of oil, which denotes both power and plenty, and therewith anointed Solomon. We do not find that Abiathar pretended to anoint Adonijah: he was made king by a feast, not by an unction. Whom God calls, he will qualify, which was signified by the anointing; usurpers had it not. *Christ* signifies *anointed*, and he is the king whom God hath set upon his holy hill of *Sion*, according to decree, Ps. ii. 6, 7. Christians also are made to our God (and by him) kings, and they have an unction from the Holy One, 1 John ii. 20. The people, hereupon, express their great joy and satisfaction in the elevation of Solomon, surround him with their Hosannas—*God save king Solomon*, and attend him with their music and shouts of joy, v. 40. Hereby they declared their concurrence in the choice, and that he was not forced upon them, but cheerfully accepted by them. The power of a prince can be little satisfaction to himself, unless he knows it to be a satisfaction to his people. Every Israelite indeed rejoices in the exaltation of the Son of David.

41 And Adonijah and all the guests that were with him heard it as they had made an end of eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar? 42 And while he yet spake, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came: and Adonijah said unto him, Come in; for thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings. 43 And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king. 44 And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride upon the king's mule: 45 And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon: and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that ye have heard. 46 And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom. 47 And moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne. And the king bowed himself upon the bed. 48 And also thus said the king, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel,

which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it. 49 And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way. 50 And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 51 And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon; for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword. 52 And Solomon said, If he will show himself a worthy man, there shall not a hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. 53 So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

We have here,

I. The tidings of Solomon's inauguration brought to Adonijah and his party, in the midst of their jollity: *They had made an end of eating*, and, it should seem, it was a great while before they made an end, for all the affair of Solomon's anointing was ordered and finished while they were at dinner, glutting themselves. Thus those who *serve not our Lord Christ*, but oppose him, are commonly such as *serve their own belly* (Rom. xvi. 18) and make a god of it, Phil. iii. 19. Their long feast intimates likewise that they were very secure and confident of their interest, else they would not have lost so much time. The old world and Sodom were *eating and drinking*, secure and sensual, when their destruction came, Luke xvii. 26, &c. When they made an end of eating, and were preparing themselves to proclaim their king, and bring him in triumph into the city, they heard the sound of the trumpet (v. 41), and a dreadful sound it was in their ears, Job xv. 21. Joab was an old man, and was alarmed at it, apprehending the city to be in an uproar; but Adonijah was very confident that the messenger, being a *worthy man*, brought good tidings, v. 42. Usurpers flatter themselves with the hopes of success, and those are commonly least timorous whose condition is most dangerous. But how can those who do evil deeds expect to have good tidings? No, the worthiest man will bring them the worst news, as the priest's son did here to Adonijah, v. 43. "*Verily*, the best tidings I have to bring you is that *Solomon is made king*, so that your pretensions are all quashed." He

relates to them very particularly, 1. With what great solemnity *Solomon* was made king (v. 44, 45), and that he was now sitting on the throne of the kingdom, v. 46. Adonijah thought to have stepped into the throne before him, but Solomon was too quick for him. 2. With what general satisfaction Solomon was made king, so that that which was done was not likely to be undone again. (1.) The people were pleased, witness their joyful acclamations, v. 45. (2.) The courtiers were pleased: *The king's servants* attended him with an address of congratulation upon this occasion, v. 47. We have here the heads of their address: They blessed king David, applauded his prudent care for the public welfare, acknowledged their happiness under his government, and prayed heartily for his recovery. They also prayed for Solomon, that God would make his name better than his father's, which it might well be when he had his father's foundation to build upon. A child, on a giant's shoulders, is higher than the giant himself. (3.) The king himself was pleased: He bowed himself upon the bed, not only to signify his acceptance of his servants' address, but to offer up his own address to God (v. 48): "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, who, as Israel's God, for Israel's good, has brought this matter to such a happy issue, *my eyes even seeing it.*" Note, It is a great satisfaction to good men, when they are going out of the world, to see the affairs of their families in a good posture, their children rising up in their stead to serve God and their generation, and especially to see peace upon Israel and the establishment of it.

II. The effectual crush which this gave to Adonijah's attempt. It spoiled the sport of his party, dispersed the company, and obliged every man to shift for his own safety. *The triumphing of the wicked is short.* They were building a castle in the air, which, having no foundation, would soon fall and crush them. They were afraid of being taken in the fact, while they were together hatching their treason, and therefore each one made the best of his way.

III. The terror Adonijah himself was in, and the course he took to secure himself. He was now as much depressed as he had been elevated, v. 42, 50. He had despised Solomon as not worthy to be his guest (v. 10), but now he dreads him as his judge: *He feared because of Solomon.* Thus those who oppose Christ and his kingdom will shortly be made to tremble before him, and call in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from his wrath. He took hold on the horns of the altar, which was always looked upon as a sanctuary, or place of refuge (Exod. xxi. 14), intimating hereby that he durst not stand a trial, but threw himself upon the mercy of his prince, in suing for which he relied upon no other plea than the mercy of God, which was manifested in the institution and acceptance of the sacrifices

that were offered on that altar and the remission of sin thereupon. Perhaps Adonijah had formerly slighted the service of the altar, yet now he courts the protection of it. Many who in the day of their security neglect the great salvation, under the arrests of the terrors of the Lord would gladly be beholden to Christ and his merit, and, when it is too late, will catch hold of the horns of the altar.

IV. His humble address to Solomon for mercy. By those who brought Solomon tidings where he was, he sent a request for his life (v. 51): *Let king Solomon swear to me that he will not slay his servant.* He owns Solomon for his prince, and himself his servant, dares not justify himself, but makes supplication to his judge. It was a great change with him. He that in the morning was grasping at a crown is before night begging for his life. Then Adonijah reigned, now Adonijah trembles, and cannot think himself safe unless Solomon promise, with an oath, not to put him to death.

V. The orders Solomon gave concerning him. He discharged him upon his good behaviour, r. 52, 53. He considered that Adonijah was his brother, and that it was the first offence. Perhaps, being so soon made sensible of his error and then not persisting in his rebellion, he might prove not only a peaceable, but a serviceable subject, and therefore, if he will conduct himself well for the future, what is past shall be pardoned; but if he be found disaffected, turbulent, and aspiring, this offence shall be remembered against him, he shall be called up upon his former conviction (as our law speaks), and execution shall be awarded against him. Thus the Son of David receives those to mercy that have been rebellious: if they will return to their allegiance, and be faithful to their Sovereign, their former crimes shall not be mentioned against them; but, if still they continue in the interests of the world and the flesh, this will be their ruin. Adonijah is sent for, and told upon what terms he stands, which he signifies his grateful submission to, and then is told to go to his house and live retired there. Solomon not only gave him his life, but his estate, thus establishing his throne by mercy.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have David setting and Solomon at the same time rising. 1. The conclusion of David's reign with his life.

1. The charge he gives to Solomon upon his death-bed, in general, to serve God (ver. 1-4), in particular, concerning Joab, Bazzania, and Shimei, ver. 5-9. 2. His death and burial, and the years of his reign, ver. 10, 11. 11. The beginning of Solomon's reign, ver. 12. In which he was to be a prince of peace, he began his reign with some remarkable acts of justice, 1. Upon Adonijah, whom he put to death for his aspiring pretensions, ver. 13-25. 2. Upon Abiathar, whom he deposed from the high priesthood for siding with Adonijah, ver. 26, 27. 3. Upon Joah, whom he put to death for his late treasons and former murders, ver. 28-35. 4. Upon Shimei, whom, for cursing David, he confined to Jerusalem (ver. 36-38), and three years after, for transgressing the rules, put to death, ver. 39-46.

NOW the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying,

2 I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; 3 And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: 4 That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel. 5 Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Anasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that *was* about his loins, and in his shoes that *were* on his feet. 6 Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. 7 But show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother. 8 And, behold, *thou hast* with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. 9 Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou *art* a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood. 10 So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. 11 And the days that David reigned over Israel *were* forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

David, that great and good man, is here a

dying man (v. 1), and a dead man, v. 10. It is well there is another life after this, for death stains all the glory of this, and lays it in the dust. We have here,

1. The charge and instructions which David, when he was dying, gave to Solomon, his son and declared successor. He feels himself declining, and is not backward to own it, nor afraid to hear or speak of dying: *I go the way of all the earth, v. 2.* Heb. *I am walking in it.* Note, Death is a way; not only a period of this life, but a passage to a better. It is *the way of all the earth*, of all mankind who dwell on earth, and are themselves earth, and therefore must return to their earth. Even the sons and heirs of heaven must *go the way of all the earth*, they must needs die; but they walk with pleasure in this way, *through the valley of the shadow of death*, Ps. xxiii. 4. Prophets, and even kings, must go this way to brighter light and honour than prophecy or sovereignty. David is going this way, and therefore gives Solomon directions what to do.

1. He charges him, in general, to keep God's commandments and to make conscience of his duty, v. 2—4. He prescribes to him, (1.) A good rule to act by—the divine will “Govern thyself by that.” David's charge to him is to *keep the charge of the Lord his God*. The authority of a dying father is much, but nothing to that of a living God. There are great trusts which we are charged with by the Lord our God—let us keep them carefully, as those that must give account; and excellent statutes, which we must be ruled by—let us also keep them. The written word is our rule. Solomon must himself do *as was written in the law of Moses*. (2.) A good spirit to act with: *Be strong and show thyself a man*, though in years but a child. Those that would keep the charge of the Lord their God must put on resolution. (3.) Good reasons for all this. This would effectually conduce, [1.] To the prosperity of his kingdom. It is the way to *prosper in all thou doest*, and to succeed with honour and satisfaction in every undertaking. [2.] To the perpetuity of it: *That the Lord may continue* and so confirm *his word which he spoke concerning me*. Those that rightly value the treasure of the promise, that sacred *depositum*, cannot but be solicitous to preserve the entail of it, and very desirous that those who come after them may do nothing to cut it off. Let each, in his own age, successively, keep God's charge, and then God will be sure to continue his word. We never let fall the promise till we let fall the precept. God had *promised* David that the Messiah should come from his loins, and that promise was absolute: but the promise that there should not fail him *a man on the throne of Israel* was conditional—if his seed behave themselves as they should. If Solomon, in his day, fulfil the condition, he does his part towards the perpetuating of the pro-

mise. The condition is that he walk before God in all his institutions, in sincerity, with zeal and resolution; and, in order hereunto, that he *take heed to his way*. In order to our constancy in religion, nothing is more necessary than caution and circumspection.

2. He gives him directions concerning some particular persons, what to do with them, that he might make up his deficiencies in justice to some and kindness to others. (1.) Concerning Joab, *v. 5*. David was now conscious to himself that he had not done well to spare him, when he had made himself once and again obnoxious to the law, by the murder of Abner first and afterwards of Amasa, both of them great men, *captains of the hosts of Israel*. He slew them treacherously (*shed the blood of war in peace*), and injuriously to David: *Thou knowest what he did to me therein*. The murder of a subject is a wrong to the prince, it is a loss to him, and is against the peace of our sovereign lord the king. These murders were particularly against David, reflecting upon his reputation, he being, at that time, in treaty with the victims, and hazarding his interest, which they were very capable of serving. Magistrates are the avengers of the blood of those they have the charge of. It aggravated Joab's crime that he was neither ashamed of the sin nor afraid of the punishment, but daringly wore the girdle and shoes that were stained with innocent blood, in defiance of the justice both of God and the king. David refers him to Solomon's wisdom (*v. 6*), with an intimation that he left him to his justice. Say not, "He has a hoary head; it is a pity it should be cut off, for it will shortly fall of itself." No, let it not *go down to the grave in peace*. Though he has been long reprieved, he shall be reckoned with at last; time does not wear out the guilt of any sin, particularly that of murder. (2.) Concerning Barzillai's family, to whom he orders him to be kind for Barzillai's sake, who, we may suppose, by this time, was dead, *v. 7*. When David, upon his death-bed, was remembering the injuries that had been done, he could not forget the kindnesses that had been shown, but leaves it as a charge upon his son to return them. Note, The kindnesses we have received from our friends must not be buried either in their graves or ours, but our children must return them to theirs. Hence, perhaps, Solomon fetched that rule (*Prov. xxvii. 10*), *Thy own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not*. Paul prays for the house of Onesiphorus, who had often refreshed him. (3.) Concerning Shimei, *v. 8, 9*. [1.] His crime is remembered: *He cursed me with a grievous curse; the more grievous because he insulted him when he was in misery and poured vinegar into his wounds*. The Jews say that one thing which made this a grievous curse was that, besides all that is mentioned (*2 Sam. xvi.*), Shimei upbraided him with his descent from Ruth the Moabitess. [2.]

His pardon is not forgotten. David owned he had sworn to him that he would not himself put him to death, because he seasonably submitted, and cried *Peccavi—I have sinned*, and he was not willing, especially at that juncture, to use the sword of public justice for the avenging of wrongs done to himself. But, [3.] His case, as it now stands, is left with Solomon, as one that knew what was fit to be done and would do as he found occasion. David intimates to him that his pardon was not designed to be perpetual, but only a reprieve for David's life: "*Hold him not guiltless; do not think him any true friend to thee or thy government, nor fit to be trusted*. He has no less malice than he had then, though he has more sense to conceal it. He is still a debtor to the public justice for what he did then; and, though I promised him that I would not put him to death, I never promised that my successor should not. His turbulent spirit will soon give thee an occasion, which thou shouldst not fail to take, for the bringing of his hoary head to the grave with blood." This proceeded not from personal revenge, but a prudent zeal for the honour of the government and the covenant God had made with his family, the contempt of which ought not to go unpunished. Even a hoary head, if a guilty and forfeited head, ought not to be any man's protection from justice. *The sinner, being a hundred years old, shall be cursed*, *1sa. lxx. 20*.

II. David's death and burial (*v. 10*): He was buried in the city of David, not in the burying place of his father, as Saul was, but in his own city, which he was the founder of. There were set the thrones, and there the tombs, of the house of David. Now David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption, *Acts xiii. 36*, and see *Acts ii. 29*. His epitaph may be taken from *2 Sam. xxiii. 1*. Here lies David the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, adding his own words (*Ps. xvi. 9*), *My flesh also shall rest in hope*. Josephus says that, besides the usual magnificence with which his son Solomon buried him, he put into his sepulchre a vast deal of money; and that 1300 years after (so he reckons) it was opened by Hircanus the high priest, in the time of Antiochus, and 3000 talents were taken out for the public service. The years of his reign are here computed (*v. 11*) to be forty years; the odd six months which he reigned above seven years in Hebron are not reckoned, but the even sum only.

12 Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established greatly. 13 And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bath-sheba the mother of

Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. 14 He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. 15 And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and *that* all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD. 16 And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. 17 And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife. 18 And Bath-sheba said, Well; I will speak for thee unto the king. 19 Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. 20 Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee: *I pray thee*, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay. 21 And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. 22 And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. 23 Then king Solomon sware by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. 24 Now therefore, *as* the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me a house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. 25 And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died.

Here is, I. Solomon's accession to the throne, v. 12. He came to it much more

easily and peaceably than David did, and much sooner saw his government established. It is happy for a kingdom when the end of one good reign is the beginning of another, as it was here.

II. His just and necessary removal of Adonijah his rival, in order to the establishment of his throne. Adonijah had made some bold pretensions to the crown, but was soon obliged to let them fall and throw himself upon Solomon's mercy, who dismissed him upon his good behaviour, and, had he been easy, he might have been safe. But here we have him betraying himself into the hands of Solomon's justice, and falling by it, the righteous God leaving him to himself, that he might be punished for his former treason and that Solomon's throne might be established. Many thus ruin themselves, because they know not when they are well off, or well done to; and sinners, by presuming on God's patience, treasure up wrath to themselves. Now observe,

1. Adonijah's treasonable project, which was to marry Abishag, David's concubine, not because he was in love with her, but because, by her, he hoped to renew his claim to the crown, which might stand him in stead, or because it was then looked upon as a branch of the government to have *the wives of the predecessor*, 2 Sam. xii. 8. Absalom thought his pretensions much supported by lying with his father's concubines. Adonijah flatters himself that if he may succeed him in his bed, especially with the best of his wives, he may by that means step up to succeed him in his throne. Restless and turbulent spirits reach high. It was but a small game to play at, as it should seem, yet he hoped to make it an after-game for the kingdom, and now to gain that by a wife which he could not gain by force.

2. The means he used to compass this. He durst not make suit to Abishag immediately (he knew she was at Solomon's disposal, and he would justly resent it if his consent were not first obtained, as even Ishbosheth did, in a like case, 2 Sam. iii. 7), nor durst he himself apply immediately to Solomon, knowing that he lay under his displeasure; but he engaged Bathsheba to be his friend in this matter, who would be forward to believe it a matter of love, and not apt to suspect it a matter of policy. Bathsheba was surprised to see Adonijah in her apartment, and asked him if he did not come with a design to do her a mischief, because she had been instrumental to crush his late attempt. "No," says he, "I come *peaceably* (v. 13), and to beg a favour" (v. 14), that she would use the great interest she had in her son to gain his consent, that he might marry Abishag (v. 16, 17), and, if he may but obtain this, he will thankfully accept it, (1.) As a compensation for his loss of the kingdom. He insinuates (v. 15), "*Thou knowest the kingdom was mine*, as my father's

eldest son, living at the time of his death, and all Israel set their faces on me." This was false; they were but a few that he had on his side; yet thus he would represent himself as an object of compassion, that had been deprived of a crown, and therefore might well be gratified in a wife. If he may not inherit his father's throne, yet let him have something valuable that was his father's, to keep for his sake, and let it be Abishag. (2.) As his reward for his acquiescence in that loss. He owns Solomon's right to the kingdom: "*It was his from the Lord. I was foolish in offering to contest it; and now that it is turned about to him I am satisfied.*" Thus he pretends to be well pleased with Solomon's accession to the throne, when he is doing all he can to give him disturbance. *His words were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart.*

3. Bathsheba's address to Solomon on his behalf. She promised to speak to the king for him (v. 18) and did so, v. 19. Solomon received her with all the respect that was due to a mother, though he himself was a king: *He rose up to meet her, bowed himself to her, and caused her to sit on his right hand,* according to the law of the fifth commandment. Children, not only when grown up, but when grown great, must give honour to their parents, and behave dutifully and respectfully towards them. *Despise not thy mother when she is old.* As a further instance of the deference he paid to his mother's wisdom and authority, when he understood she had a petition to present to him, he promised not to say her nay, a promise which both he and she understood with this necessary limitation, provided it be just and reasonable and fit to be granted; but, if it were otherwise, he was sure he should convince her that it was so, and that then she would withdraw it. She tells him her errand at last (v. 21): *Let Abishag be given to Adonijah thy brother.* It was strange that she did not suspect the treason, but more strange that she did not abhor the incest, that was in the proposal. But either she did not take Abishag to be David's wife, because the marriage was not consummated, or she thought it might be dispensed with to gratify Adonijah, in consideration of his tame submission to Solomon. This was her weakness and folly: it was well that she was not regent. Note, Those that have the ear of princes and great men, as it is their wisdom not to be too prodigal of their interest, so it is their duty never to use it for the assistance of sin or the furtherance of any wicked design. Let not princes be asked that which they ought not to grant. It ill becomes a good man to prefer a bad request or appear in a bad cause.

4. Solomon's just and judicious rejection of the request. Though his mother herself was the advocate, and called it a *small petition*, and perhaps it was the first she had troubled him with since he was king, yet he

denied it, without violation of the general promise he had made, v. 20. If Herod had not had a mind to cut off John Baptist's head, he would not have thought himself obliged to do it by a general promise, like this, made to Herodias. The best friend we have in the world must not have such an interest in us as to bring us to do a wrong thing, either unjust or unwise. (1.) Solomon convinces his mother of the unreasonableness of the request, and shows her the tendency of it, which, before, she was not aware of. His reply is somewhat sharp: "*Ask for him the kingdom also,* v. 22. To ask that he may succeed the king in his bed is, in effect, to ask that he may succeed him in his throne; for that is it he aims at." Probably he had information, or cause for a strong suspicion, that Adonijah was plotting with Joab and Abiathar to give him disturbance, which warranted him to put this construction upon Adonijah's request. (2.) He convicts and condemns Adonijah for his pretensions, and both with an oath. He convicts him out of his own mouth, v. 23. His own tongue shall fall upon him; and a heavier load a man needs not fall under. Bathsheba may be imposed upon, but Solomon cannot; he plainly sees what Adonijah aims at, and concludes, "*He has spoken this word against his own life; he is snared in the words of his own lips; now he shows what he would be at.*" He condemns him to die immediately: *He shall be put to death this day,* v. 24. God had himself declared with an oath that he would establish David's throne (Ps. lxxxix. 35), and therefore Solomon pledges the same assurance to secure that establishment, by cutting off the enemies of it. "*As God liveth, that establisheth the government, Adonijah shall die, that would unsettle it.*" Thus the ruin of the enemies of Christ's kingdom is as sure as the stability of his kingdom, and both are as sure as the being and life of God, the founder of it. The warrant is immediately signed for his execution, and no less a man than Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, general of the army, is ordered to be the executioner, v. 25. It is strange that Adonijah may not be heard to speak for himself; but Solomon's wisdom did not see it needful to examine the matter any further; it was plain enough that Adonijah aimed at the crown, and Solomon could not be safe while he lived. Ambitious turbulent spirits commonly prepare for themselves the instruments of death. Many a head has been lost by catching at a crown.

26 And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because

thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. 27 So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh. 28 Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 29 And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, *he is* by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. 30 And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. 31 And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. 32 And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing *thereof, to wit*, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. 33 Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. 34 So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.

Abiathar and Joab were both aiding and abetting in Adonijah's rebellious attempt, and it is probable were at the bottom of this new motion made by Adonijah for Abishag, and it should seem Solomon knew it, *v. 22*. This was, in both, an intolerable affront both to God and to the government, and the worse because of their high station and the great

influence their examples might have upon many. They therefore come next to be reckoned with. They are both equally guilty of the treason, but, in the judgment passed upon them, a difference is made and with good reason.

1. Abiathar, in consideration of his old services, is only degraded, *v. 26, 27*. 1. Solomon convicts him, and by his great wisdom finds him guilty. "*Thou art worthy of death*, for joining with Adonijah, when thou knewest on whose head God intended to set the crown." 2. He calls to mind the respect he had formerly shown to David his father, and that he had both ministered to him in holy things (*had borne before him the ark of the Lord*), and also had tenderly sympathized with him in his afflictions and been afflicted in them all, particularly when he was in exile and distress both by Saul's persecution and Absalom's rebellion. Note, Those that show kindness to God's people shall have it remembered to their advantage one time or other. 3. For this reason he spares Abiathar's life, but deposes him from his offices, and confines him to his country seat at Anathoth, forbids him the court, the city, the tabernacle, the altar, and all intermeddling in public business, with an intimation likewise that he was upon his good behaviour, and that though Solomon did not put him to death at this time he might another time, if he did not conduct himself well. But, for the present, he was only thrust out from being priest, as rendered unworthy that high station by the opposition he had given to that which he knew to be the will of God. Saul, for a supposed crime, had barbarously slain Abiathar's father, and eighty-five priests, their families, and city. Solomon spares Abiathar himself, though guilty of a real crime. Thus was Saul's government ruined and Solomon's established. As men are to God's ministers, they will find him to them. 4. The depriving of Abiathar was the fulfilling of the threatening against the house of Eli (1 Sam. ii. 30), for he was the last high priest of that family. It was now above eighty years since the ruin was threatened; but God's judgments, though not executed speedily, will be executed surely.

II. Joab, in consideration of his old sins, is put to death.

1. His guilty conscience sent him to the horns of the altar. He heard that Adonijah was executed and Abiathar deposed, and therefore, fearing his turn would be next, he fled for refuge to the altar. Many that, in the day of their security, care not for the service of the altar, will be glad of the protection of it in the day of their distress. Some think Joab designed thereby to devote himself for the future to a constant attendance upon the altar, hoping thereby to obtain his pardon, as some that have lived a dissolute life all their days have thought to atone for their crimes by retiring into a monastery wher

they are old, leaving the world when it has left them, and no thanks to them.

2. Solomon ordered him to be put to death there for the murder of Abner and Amasa; for these were the crimes upon which he thought fit to ground the sentence, rather than upon his treasonable adherence to Adonijah. Joab was indeed worthy of death for turning after Adonijah, in contempt of Solomon and his designation to the throne, *though he had not turned after Absalom, v. 28.* Former fidelity will not serve to excuse any after treachery; yet, besides that, Joab had merited well of the house of David, to which and to his country he had done a great deal of good service in his day, in consideration of which, it is probable, Solomon would have pardoned him his offence against him (for clemency gives great reputation and establishment to an infant government), and would have only displaced him as he did Abiathar; but he must die for the murders he had formerly been guilty of, which his father had charged Solomon to call him to an account for. The debt he owed to the innocent blood that was shed, by answering its cries with the blood of him that shed it, he could not pay himself, but left it to his son to pay it, who, having power wherewithal, failed not to do it. On this he grounds the sentence, aggravating the crime (*v. 32*), that he *fell upon two men more righteous and better than he*, that had done him no wrong nor meant him any, and, had they lived, might probably have done David better service (if the blood shed be not only innocent, but excellent, the life more valuable than common lives, the crime is the more heinous), that David knew not of it, and yet the case was such that he would be suspected as privy to it; so that Joab endangered his prince's reputation in taking away the life of his rivals, which was a further aggravation. For these crimes, (1.) He must die, and die by the sword of public justice. *By man must his blood be shed*, and it lies upon his own head (*v. 32*), as theirs does whom he had murdered, *v. 33*. Woe to the head that lies under the guilt of blood! Vengeance for murder was long in coming upon Joab; but, when it did come, it remained the longer, being here entailed *upon the head of his seed for ever* (*v. 33*), who, instead of deriving honour, as otherwise they might have done, from his heroic actions, derived guilt, and shame, and a curse, from his villainous actions, on account of which they fared the worse in this world. The seed of such evil doers shall never be renowned. (2.) He must die at the altar, rather than escape. Joab resolved not to stir from the altar (*v. 30*), hoping thereby either to secure himself or else to render Solomon odious to the people, as a profaner of the holy place, if he should put him to death there. Benaiah made a scruple of either killing him there or dragging him thence: but Solomon knew the law, that the altar of

God should give no protection to wilful murderers. *Exod. xxi. 14, Thou shalt take him from my altar that he may die*, may die a sacrifice. In case of such sins as the blood of beasts would atone for the altar was a refuge, but not in Joab's case. He therefore orders him to be executed there, if he could not be got thence, to show that he feared not the censure of the people in doing his duty, but would rectify their mistake, and let them know that the administration of justice is better than sacrifice, and that the holiness of any place should never countenance the wickedness of any person. Those who, by a lively faith, take hold on Christ and his righteousness, with a resolution, if they perish, to perish there, shall find in him a more powerful protection than Joab found at the horns of the altar. Benaiah slew him (*v. 34*), with the solemnity, no doubt, of a public execution. The law being thus satisfied, he was *buried in his own house in the wilderness*, privately, like a criminal, not pompously, like a soldier; yet no indignity was done to his dead body. It is not for man to lay the iniquity upon the bones, whatever God does.

3. Solomon pleased himself with this act of justice, not as it gratified any personal revenge, but as it was the fulfilling of his father's orders and a real kindness to himself and his own government. (1.) Guilt was hereby removed, *v. 31*. By returning the innocent blood that had been shed upon the head of him that shed it, it was taken away from him and from the house of his father, which implies that the blood which is not required from the murderer will be required from the magistrate, at least there is danger lest it should. Those that would have their houses safe and built up must put away iniquity far from them. (2.) Peace was hereby secured (*v. 33*) upon David. He does not mean his person, but, as he explains himself in the next words, *Upon his seed, his house, and his throne*, shall there be *peace for ever from the Lord*; thus he expresses his desire that it may be so and his hope that it shall be so. "Now that justice is done, and the cry of blood is satisfied, the government will prosper." Thus *righteousness and peace kiss each other*. Now that such a turbulent man as Joab is removed there shall be peace. *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness*, *Prov. xxv. 5*. Solomon, in this blessing of peace upon his house and throne, piously looks upward to God as the author of it and forward to eternity as the perfection of it. "It shall be peace from the Lord, and peace for ever from the Lord." The Lord of peace himself give us that peace which is everlasting.

35 And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host: and Zadok the priest did the



king put in the room of Abiathar. 36 And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee a house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither. 37 For it shall be, *that* on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head. 38 And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. 39 And it came to pass after the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants *be* in Gath. 40 And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath. 41 And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again. 42 And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word *that* I have heard is good. 43 Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with? 44 The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head; 45 And king Solomon *shall be* blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever. 46 So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Here is, I. The preferment of Benaiah and Zadok, two faithful friends to Solomon

and his government, v. 35. Joab being put to death, Benaiah was advanced to be general of the forces in his room, and, Abiathar being deposed, Zadok was made high priest in his room, and therein was fulfilled that word of God, when he threatened to cut off the house of Eli (1 Sam. ii. 35), *I will raise me up a faithful priest, and will build him a sure house.* Though sacred offices may be disgraced, they shall not be destroyed, by the mal-administration of those that are entrusted with them, nor shall God's work ever stand still for want of hands to carry it on. No wonder that he who was a king so immediately of God's making was empowered to make whom he thought fit high priest; and he exercised this power with equity, for the ancient right was in Zadok, he being of the family of Elcazar, whereas Eli and his house were of Ithamar.

II. The course that was taken with Shimei. He is sent for, by a messenger, from his house at Bahurim, expecting perhaps no better than Adonijah's doom, being conscious of his enmity to the house of David; but Solomon knows how to make a difference of crimes and criminals. David had promised Shimei his life for his time. Solomon is not bound by that promise, yet he will not go directly contrary to it. 1. He confines him to Jerusalem, and forbids him, upon any pretence whatsoever, to go out of the city any further than the brook Kidron, v. 36, 37. He would not suffer him to continue at his country seat lest he should make mischief among his neighbours, but took him to Jerusalem, where he kept him prisoner at large. This might make Shimei's confinement easy to himself, for Jerusalem was beautiful for situation, *the joy of the whole earth*, the royal city, the holy city (he had no reason to complain of being shut up in such a paradise); it would also make it the more safe for Solomon, for there he would have him under his eye and be able to watch his motions; and he plainly tells him that if he ever go out of the rules he shall certainly die for it. This was a fair trial of his obedience, and such a test of his loyalty as he had no reason to complain of. He has his life upon easy terms: he shall live if he will but be content to live at Jerusalem. 2. Shimei submits to the confinement, and thankfully takes his life upon those terms. He enters into recognizance (v. 38), under the penalty of death, not to stir out of Jerusalem, and owns that the saying is good. Even those that perish cannot but own the conditions of pardon and life unexceptionable, so that their blood, like Shimei's, must rest upon their own heads. Shimei promised, with an oath, to keep within his bounds, v. 42. 3. Shimei forfeits his recognizance, which was the thing Solomon expected; and God was righteous in suffering him to do it, that he might now suffer for his old sins. Two of his servants (it seems, though he was a prisoner, he lived

like himself, well attended) ran from him to the land of the Philistines, v. 39. Thither he pursued them, and thence brought them back to Jerusalem, v. 40. For the keeping of it private he *saddled his ass* himself, probably went in the night, and came home he thought undiscovered. "Seeking his servants," says bishop Hall, "he lost himself; these earthly things either are, or should be, our servants. How commonly do we see men run out of the bounds set by God's law, to hunt after them, till their souls incur a fearful judgment!" 4. Solomon takes the forfeiture. Information is given him that Shimei has transgressed, v. 41. The king sends for him, and, (1.) Charges him with the present crime (v. 42, 43), that he had put a great contempt upon the authority and wrath both of God and the king, that he had broken *the oath of the Lord* and disobeyed the commandment of his prince, and by this it appeared what manner of spirit he was of, that he would not be held by the bonds of gratitude or conscience. Had he represented to Solomon the urgency of the occasion, and begged leave to go, perhaps Solomon might have given him leave; but to presume either upon his ignorance or his connivance was to affront him in the highest degree. (2.) He condemns him for his former crime, cursing David, and throwing stones at him in the day of his affliction: *The wickedness which thy heart is privy to*, v. 44. There was no need to examine witnesses for the proof of the fact, his own conscience was instead of a thousand witnesses. That wickedness which men's own hearts alone are privy to is enough, if duly considered, to fill them with confusion, in expectation of its return upon their own heads; for, if the heart be privy to it, God is greater than the heart and knoweth all things. Others knew of Shimei's cursing David, but Shimei himself knew of the wicked principles of hatred and malice against David which he displayed in cursing him and that his submission was but feigned and forced. (3.) He blessed himself and his government (v. 45): *King Solomon shall be blessed*, notwithstanding Shimei's impotent curses, which perhaps, in fury and despair, he now vented freely: *Let them curse, but bless thou*. And *the throne of David shall be established*, by taking away those that would undermine it. It is a comfort, in reference to the enmity of the church's enemies, that, how much soever they rage, it is a vain thing they imagine. Christ's throne is established, and they cannot shake it. (4.) He gives orders for the execution of Shimei immediately, v. 46. All judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus, and, though he be King of peace, he will be found a King of righteousness; and this will shortly be his word of command concerning all his enemies, that would not have him to reign over them: *Bring them forth, and slay them before me*; the reproaches of those that blasphemed

him will fall on themselves, to their eternal condemnation.

### CHAP. III.

Solomon's reign looked bloody in the foregoing chapter, but the necessary acts of justice must not be called cruelty; in this chapter it appears with another face. We must not think the worse of God's mercy to his subjects for his judgments or rebels. We have here, 1. Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, ver. 1. 11. A general view of his religion, ver. 2-4. 111. A particular account of his prayer to God for wisdom, and the answer to that prayer, ver. 5-15. IV. A particular instance of his wisdom in deciding the controversy between the two harlots, ver. 16-28. And very great he looks here, both at the altar and on the bench, and therefore on the bench because at the altar.

AND Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. 2 Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. 3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. 4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

We are here told concerning Solomon,

I. Something that was unquestionably good, for which he is to be praised and in which he is to be imitated. 1. He loved the Lord, v. 3. Particular notice was taken of God's love to him, 2 Sam. xii. 24. He had his name from it: *Jedidiah—beloved of the Lord*. And here we find he returned that love, as John, the beloved disciple, was most full of love. Solomon was a wise man, a rich man, a great man; yet the brightest encomium of him is that which is the character of all the saints, even the poorest, He loved the Lord. He loved the worship of the Lord, so the Chaldee: all that love God love his worship, love to hear from him and speak to him, and so to have communion with him. 2. He walked in the statutes of David his father, that is, in the statutes that David gave him, ch. ii. 2, 3; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 10 (his dying father's charge was sacred, and as a law to him), or in God's statutes, which David his father walked in before him; he kept close to God's ordinances, carefully observed them and diligently attended them. Those that truly love God will make conscience of walking in his statutes. 3. He was very free and generous in what he did for the honour of God. When he offered sacrifice he offered like a king, in some proportion to his great wealth, a thousand burnt-offerings, v. 4. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly; and those

that truly love God and his worship will not grudge the expenses of their religion. We may be tempted to say, *To what purpose is this waste?* Might not these cattle have been given to the poor? But we must never think that wasted which is laid out in the service of God. It seems strange how so many beasts should be burnt upon one altar in one feast, though it continued seven days; but the fire on the altar is supposed to be more quick and devouring than common fire, for it represented that fierce and mighty wrath of God which fell upon the sacrifices, that the offerers might escape. *Our God is a consuming fire.* Bishop Patrick quotes it as a tradition of the Jews that the smoke of the sacrifices ascended directly in a straight pillar, and was not scattered, otherwise it would have choked those that attended, when so many sacrifices were offered as were here.

II. Here is something concerning which it may be doubted whether it was good or no. 1. His marrying Pharaoh's daughter, *v. 1.* We will suppose she was proselyted, otherwise the marriage would not have been lawful; yet, if so, surely it was not advisable. He that *loved the Lord* should, for his sake, have fixed his love upon one of the Lord's people. Unequal matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men have often been of pernicious consequence; yet some think that he did this with the advice of his friends, that she was a sincere convert (for the gods of the Egyptians are not reckoned among the strange gods which his strange wives drew him in to the worship of, *ch. xi. 5, 6*), and that the book of Canticles and the 45th Psalm were penned on this occasion, by which these nuptials were made typical of the mystical espousals of the church to Christ, especially the Gentile church. 2. His worshipping in the high places, and thereby tempting the people to do so too, *v. 2, 3.* Abraham built his altars on mountains (*Gen. xii. 8; xxii. 2*), and worshipped in a grove, *Gen. xxi. 33.* Thence the custom was derived, and was proper, till the divine law confined them to one place, *Deut. xii. 5, 6.* David kept to the ark, and did not care for the high places, but Solomon, though in other things he *walked in the statutes of his father*, in this came short of him. He showed thereby a great zeal for sacrificing, but to obey would have been better. This was an irregularity. Though there was as yet no house built, there was a tent pitched, to the name of the Lord, and the ark ought to have been the centre of their unity. It was so by divine institution; from it the high places separated; yet while they worshipped God only, and in other things according to the rule, he graciously overlooked their weakness, and accepted their services; and it is owned that *Solomon loved the Lord*, though he *burnt incense in the high places*, and let not men be more severe than God is.

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. 6 And Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. 7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and *I am but* a little child: I know not *how* to go out or come in. 8 And thy servant *is* in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? 10 And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; 12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. 13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. 14 And it thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. 15 And Solomon awoke: and, behold, *it was* a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

We have here an account of a gracious visit which God paid to Solomon, and the communion he had with God in it, which put a greater honour upon Solomon than all the wealth and power of his kingdom did.

I. The circumstances of this visit, v. 5. 1. The place. It was in Gibeon; that was the great high place, and should have been the only one, because there the tabernacle and the brazen altar were, 2 Chron. i. 3. There Solomon offered his great sacrifices, and there God owned him more than in any other of the high places. The nearer we come to the rule in our worship the more reason we have to expect the tokens of God's presence. Where God records his name, there he will meet us and bless us. 2. The time. It was by night, the night after he had offered that generous sacrifice, v. 4. The more we abound in God's work the more comfort we may expect in him; if the day has been busy for him, the night will be easy in him. Silence and retirement befriend our communion with God. His kindest visits are often in the night, Ps. xvii. 3. 3. The manner. It was in a dream, when he was asleep, his senses locked up, that God's access to his mind might be the more free and immediate. In this way God used to speak to the prophets (Num. xii. 6) and to private persons, for their own benefit, Job xxxiii. 15, 16. These divine dreams, no doubt, were plainly distinguishable from those in which there are divers vanities, Eccl. v. 7.

II. The gracious offer God made him of the favour he should choose, whatever it might be, v. 5. He saw the glory of God shine about him, and heard a voice saying, *Ask what I shall give thee.* Not that God was indebted to him for his sacrifices, but thus he would testify his acceptance of them, and signify to him what great mercy he had in store for him, if he were not wanting to himself. Thus he would try his inclinations and put an honour upon the prayer of faith. God, in like manner, condescends to us, and puts us in the ready way to be happy by assuring us that we shall have what we will for the asking, John xvi. 23; 1 John v. 14. What would we more? *Ask, and it shall be given you.*

III. The pious request Solomon hereupon made to God. He readily laid hold of this offer. Why do we neglect the like offer made to us, like Ahaz, who said, *I will not ask?* Isa. vii. 12. Solomon prayed in his sleep, God's grace assisting him; yet it was a lively prayer. What we are most in care about, and which makes the greatest impression upon us when we are awake, commonly affects us when we are asleep; and by our dreams, sometimes, we may know what our hearts are upon and how our pulse beats. Plutarch makes virtuous dreams one evidence of increase in virtue. Yet this must be attributed to a higher source. Solomon's making such an intelligent choice as this when he

was asleep, and the powers of reason were least active, showed that it came purely from the grace of God, which wrought in him these gracious desires. If his *reins thus instruct him in the night season*, he must *bless the Lord who gave him counsel*, Ps. xvi. 7. Now, in this prayer,

1. He acknowledges God's great goodness to his father David, v. 6. He speaks honourably of his father's piety, that he had *walked before God in uprightness of heart*, drawing a veil over his faults. It is to be hoped that those who praise their godly parents will imitate them. But he speaks more honourably of God's goodness to his father, the mercy he had shown to him while he lived, in giving him to be sincerely religious and then recompensing his sincerity, and the great kindness he had kept for him, to be bestowed on his family when he was gone, in *giving him a son to sit on his throne*. Children should give God thanks for his mercies to their parents, for the sure mercies of David. God's favours are doubly sweet when we observe them transmitted to us through the hands of those that have gone before us. The way to get the entail perpetuated is to bless God that it has hitherto been preserved.

2. He owns his own insufficiency for the discharge of that great trust to which he is called, v. 7, 8. And here is a double plea to enforce his petition for wisdom:—(1.) That his place required it, as he was successor to David (*Thou hast made me king instead of David*, who was a very wise and good man: Lord, give me wisdom, that I may keep up what he wrought, and carry on what he began") and as he was ruler over Israel: "Lord, give me wisdom to rule well; for they are a numerous people, that will not be managed without much care, and they are thy people, whom thou hast chosen, and therefore to be ruled for thee, and the more wisely they are ruled the more glory thou wilt have from them." (2.) That he wanted it. As one that had a humble sense of his own deficiency, he pleads, "*Lord, I am but a little child* (so he calls himself, a child in understanding, though his father called him a wise man, ch. ii. 9); *I know not how to go out or come in* as I should, nor to do so much as the common daily business of the government, much less what to do in a critical juncture." Note, Those who are employed in public stations ought to be very sensible of the weight and importance of their work and their own insufficiency for it, and then they are qualified for receiving divine instruction. Paul's question (*Who is sufficient for these things?*) is much like Solomon's here, *Who is able to judge this thy so great a people?* v. 9. Absalom, who was a fool, wished himself a judge; Solomon, who was a wise man, trembles at the undertaking and suspects his own fitness for it. The more knowing and considerate men are the better acquainted they are with their own

weakness and the more jealous of themselves.

3. He begs of God to give him wisdom (v. 9): *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart.* He calls himself *God's servant*, pleased with that relation to God (Ps. cxvi. 16) and pleading it with him: "I am devoted to thee, and employed for thee; give me that which is requisite to the services in which I am employed." Thus his good father prayed, and thus he pleaded. Ps. cxix. 125, *I am thy servant, give me understanding.* An understanding heart is God's gift, Prov. ii. 6. We must pray for it (James i. 5), and pray for it with application to our particular calling and the various occasions we have for it; as Solomon, *Give me an understanding*, not to please my own curiosity with, or puzzle my neighbours, but to *judge thy people*. That is the best knowledge which will be serviceable to us in doing our duty; and such that knowledge is which enables us to *discern between good and bad*, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be imposed upon by false colours in judging either of others' actions or of our own.

4. The favourable answer God gave to his request. It was a pleasing prayer (v. 10): *The speech pleased the Lord.* God is well pleased with his own work in his people, the desires of his own kindling, the prayers of his Spirit's inditing. By this choice Solomon made it appear that he desired to be good more than great, and to serve God's honour more than to advance his own. Those are accepted of God who prefer spiritual blessings to temporal, and are more solicitous to be found in the way of their duty than in the way to preferment. But that was not all; it was a prevailing prayer, and prevailed for more than he asked. (1.) God gave him wisdom, v. 12. He fitted him for all that great work to which he had called him, gave him such a right understanding of the law which he was to judge by, and the cases he was to judge of, that he was unequalled for a clear head, a solid judgment, and a piercing eye. Such an insight, and such a foresight, never was prince so blessed with. (2.) He gave him riches and honour over and above into the bargain (v. 13), and it was promised that in these he should as much exceed his predecessors, his successors, and all his neighbours, as in wisdom. These also are God's gift, and, as far as is good for them, are promised to all that *seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof*, Matt. vi. 33. Let young people learn to prefer grace to gold in all that they choose, because *godliness has the promise of the life that now is, but the life that now is has not the promise of godliness.* How completely blessed was Solomon, that had both wisdom and wealth! He that has wealth and power without wisdom and grace is in danger of doing hurt with them; he that has wisdom and grace without wealth and power is not capable of

doing so much good with them as he that has both. Wisdom is good, is so much the better, with an inheritance, Eccles. vii. 11. But, if we make sure of wisdom and grace, these will either bring outward prosperity with them or sweeten the want of it. God promised Solomon riches and honour absolutely, but long life upon condition (v. 14). *If thou wilt walk in my ways, as David did, then I will lengthen thy days.* He failed in the condition; and therefore, though he had riches and honour, he did not live so long to enjoy them as in the course of nature he might have done. Length of days is wisdom's right-hand blessing, typical of eternal life; but it is in her left hand that riches and honour are, Prov. iii. 16. Let us see here, [1.] That the way to obtain spiritual blessings is to be importunate for them, to wrestle with God in prayer for them, as Solomon did for wisdom, asking that only, as the *one thing needful*. [2.] That the way to obtain temporal blessings is to be indifferent to them and to refer ourselves to God concerning them. Solomon had wisdom given him because he did ask it and wealth because he did not ask it.

5. The grateful return Solomon made for the visit God was pleased to pay him, v. 15. He awoke, we may suppose in a transport of joy, awoke, and *his sleep was sweet to him*, as the prophet speaks (Jer. xxxi. 26); being satisfied of God's favour, he was satisfied with it, and he began to think *what he should render to the Lord.* He had made his prayer at the high place at Gibeon, and there God had graciously met him; but he comes to Jerusalem to give thanks *before the ark of the covenant*, blaming himself, as it were, that he had not prayed there, the ark being the token of God's presence, and wondering that God had met him any where else. God's passing by our mistakes should persuade us to amend them. There he, (1.) Offered a great sacrifice to God. We must give God praise for his gifts in the promise, though not yet fully performed. David used to *praise God's word*, as well as his *works* (Ps. lvi. 10, and particularly, 2 Sam. vii. 18), and Solomon trod in his steps. (2.) He made a great feast upon the sacrifice, that those about him might rejoice with him in the grace of God.

16 Then came there two women, *that were harlots*, unto the king, and stood before him. 17 And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. 18 And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we *were together*; *there was no stranger with us in the house,*

save we two in the house. 19 And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it. 20 And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. 21 And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear. 22 And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king. 23 Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living. 24 And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. 25 And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. 26 Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. 27 Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. 28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

An instance is here given of Solomon's wisdom, to show that the grant lately made him had a real effect upon him. The proof is fetched, not from the mysteries of state and the policies of the council-board, though there no doubt he excelled, but from the trial and determination of a cause between party and party, which princes, though they devolve them upon their judges, must not think it below them to take cognizance of. Observe,

I. The case opened, not by lawyers, but by the parties themselves, though they were women, which made it the easier to such a piercing eye as Solomon had to discern be-

tween right and wrong by their own showing. These two women were harlots, kept a public house, and their children, some think, were born of fornication, because here is no mention of their husbands. It is probable the cause had been heard in the inferior courts, before it was brought before Solomon, and had been found special, the judges being unable to determine it, that Solomon's wisdom in deciding it at last might be the more taken notice of. These two women, who lived in a house together, were each of them delivered of a son within three days of one another, *v.* 17, 18. They were so poor that they had no servant or nurse to be with them, so slighted, because harlots, that they had no friend or relation to accompany them. One of them overlaid her child, and, in the night, exchanged it with the other (*v.* 19, 20), who was soon aware of the cheat put upon her, and appealed to public justice to be righted, *v.* 21. See, 1. What anxiety is caused by little children, how uncertain their lives are, and to how many dangers they are continually exposed. The age of infancy is the valley of the shadow of death; and the lamp of life, when first lighted, is easily blown out. It is a wonder of mercy that so few perish in the perils of nursing. 2. How much better it was in those times with children born in fornication than commonly it is now. Harlots then loved their children, nursed them, and were loth to part with them; whereas now they are often sent to a distance, abandoned, or killed. But thus it was foretold that *in the last days perilous times should come*, when people should be without natural affection. 2 Tim. iii. 1, 3.

II. The difficulty of the case. The question was, Who was the mother of this living child, which was brought into court, to be finally adjudged either to the one or to the other? Both mothers were vehement in their claim, and showed a deep concern about it. Both were peremptory in their asseverations: "It is mine," says one. "Nay, it is mine," says the other. Neither will own the dead child, though it would be cheaper to bury that than to maintain the other: but it is the living one they strive for. The living child is therefore the parents' joy because it is their hope; and may not the dead children be so? See Jer. xxxi. 17. Now the difficulty of the case was, that there was no evidence on either side. The neighbours, though it is probable that some of them were present at the birth and circumcision of the children, yet had not taken so much notice of them as to be able to distinguish them. To put the parties to the rack would have been barbarous; not she who had justice on her side, but she who was most hardy, would have had the judgment in her favour. Little stress is to be laid on extorted evidence. Judges and juries have need of wisdom to find out truth when it thus lies hid.

III. The determination of it. Solomon, having patiently heard what both sides had to say, sums up the evidence, *v. 23*. And now the whole court is in expectation what course Solomon's wisdom will take to find out the truth. One knows not what to say to it; another, perhaps, would determine it by lot. Solomon calls for a sword, and gives orders to divide the living child between the two contenders. Now, 1. This seemed a ridiculous decision of the case, and a brutal cutting of the knot which he could not untie. "Is this," think the sages of the law, "the wisdom of Solomon?" little dreaming what he aimed at in it. *The hearts of kings, such kings, are unsearchable*, Prov. xxv. 3. There was a law concerning the dividing of a living ox and a dead one (Exod. xxi. 35), but that did not reach this case. But, 2. It proved an effectual discovery of the truth. Some think that Solomon did himself discern it, before he made this experiment, by the countenances of the women and their way of speaking: but by this he gave satisfaction to all the company, and silenced the pretender. To find out the true mother, he could not try which the child loved best, and must therefore try which loved the child best; both pretended to a motherly affection, but their sincerity will be tried when the child is in danger. (1.) She that knew the child was not her own, but in contending for it stood upon a point of honour, was well content to have it divided. She that had overlaid her own child cared not what became of this, so that the true mother might not have it: *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it*. By this it appeared that she knew her own title to be bad, and feared Solomon would find it so, though she little suspected she was betraying herself, but thought Solomon in good earnest. If she had been the true mother she would not have forfeited her interest in the child by agreeing so readily to this bloody decision. But, (2.) She that knew the child was her own, rather than the child should be butchered, gives it up to her adversary. How feelingly does she cry out, *O, my lord! give her the living child, v. 26*. "Let me see it hers, rather than not see it at all." By this tenderness towards the child it appeared that she was not the careless mother that had overlaid the dead child, but was the true mother of the living one, that could not endure to see its death, having compassion on the son of her womb. "The case is plain," says Solomon; "what need of witnesses? *Give her the living child; for you all see, by this undissembled compassion, she is the mother of it*." Let parents show their love to their children by taking care of them, especially by taking care of their souls, and, with a holy violence, snatching them as brands out of the burning. Those are most likely to have the comfort of children that do their duty to them. Satan pretends to the heart of man, h it by this it

appears that he is only a pretender, that he would be content to divide with God, whereas the rightful sovereign of the heart will have all or none.

IV. We are told what a great reputation Solomon got among his people by this and other instances of his wisdom, which would have a great influence upon the ease of his government: *They feared the king (v. 28)*, highly revered him, durst not in any thing oppose him, and were afraid of doing an unjust thing; for they knew, if ever it came before him, he would certainly discover it, *for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him*, that is, that wisdom with which God had promised to endue him. *This made his face to shine*, Eccl. viii. 1. *This strengthened him*, Eccl. vii. 19. *This was better to him than weapons of war*, Eccl. ix. 18. For this he was both feared and loved.

## CHAP. IV.

An instance of the wisdom God granted to Solomon we had in the close of the foregoing chapter. In this we have an account of his wealth and prosperity, the other branch of the promise there made him. We have here, I. The magnificence of his court, his ministers of state (*ver. 1-6*), and the purveyors of his household (*ver. 7-19*), and their office, *ver. 27, 28*. II. The provisions for his table, *ver. 22, 23*. III. The extent of his dominion, *ver. 21-24*. IV. The numbers, ease, and peace, of his subjects, *ver. 20-25*. V. His stables, *ver. 26*. VI. His great reputation for wisdom and learning, *ver. 29-34*. Thus great was Solomon, but our Lord Jesus was greater than he (*Matt. xii. 42*), though he took upon him the form of a servant: for divinity, in its lowest humiliation, infinitely transcends royalty in its highest elevation.

SO king Solomon was king over all Israel. 2 And these were the princes which he had; Azariah the son of Zadok the priest, Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder. 4 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: 5 And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend: 6 And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute. 7 And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. 8 And these are their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim: 9 The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalvim, and Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan: 12 The son of Hessed, in Aruboth; to him pertained Sochoh, and all the land of Hepher: 11 The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife: 12 Baana the son

of Ahilud; to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Beth-shean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam: 13 The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars: 14 Ahinadab the son of Iddo had Mahanaim: 15 Ahimaaz was in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife: 16 Baanah the son of Hushai was in Asher and in Aloth: 17 Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar: 18 Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin: 19 Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer which was in the land.

Here we have,

I. Solomon upon his throne (v. 1): So king Solomon was king, that is, he was confirmed and established king over all Israel, and not, as his successors, only over two tribes. He was a king, that is, he did the work and duty of a king, with the wisdom God had given him. Those preserve the name and honour of their place that mind the business of it and make conscience of it.

II. The great officers of his court, in the choice of whom, no doubt, his wisdom much appeared. It is observable, 1. That several of them are the same that were in his father's time. Zadok and Abiathar were then priests (2 Sam. xx. 25), so they were now; only then Abiathar had the precedency, now Zadok. Jehoshaphat was then recorder, or keeper of the great seal, so he was now. Benaiah, in his father's time, was a principal man in military affairs, and so he was now. Shisha was his father's scribe, and his sons were his, v. 3. Solomon, though a wise man, would not affect to be wiser than his father in this matter. When sons come to inherit their father's wealth, honour, and power, it is a piece of respect to their memory, *cateris paribus*—where it can properly be done, to employ those whom they employed, and trust those whom they trusted. Many pride themselves in being the reverse of their good parents. 2. The rest were priests' sons. His prime-minister of state was Azariah the son of Zadok the priest. Two others of the first rank were the sons of Nathan the prophet, v. 5. In preferring them he testified

the grateful respect he had for their good father, whom he loved in the name of a prophet.

III. The purveyors for his household, whose business it was to send in provisions from several parts of the country, for the king's tables and cellars (v. 7) and for his stables (v. 27, 28), that thus, 1. His house might always be well furnished at the best hand. Let great men learn hence good house-keeping and yet good husbandry in their house-keeping, to be generous in spending according to their ability, but prudent in providing. It is the character of the virtuous woman that she bringeth her food from afar (Prov. xxxi. 14), not far-fetched and dear-bought, but the contrary, every thing bought where it is cheapest. 2. That thus he himself, and those who immediately attended him, might be eased of a great deal of care, and the more closely apply themselves to the business of the state, not troubled about much serving, provision for that being got ready to their hand. 3. That thus all the parts of the kingdom might be equally benefited by the taking off of the commodities that were the productions of their country and the circulating of the coin. Industry would hereby be encouraged, and consequently wealth increased, even in those tribes that lay most remote from the court. The providence of God extends itself to all places of his dominions (Ps. ciii. 22); so should the prudence and care of princes. 4. The dividing of this trust into so many hands was prudent, that no man might be continually burdened with the care of it nor grow exorbitantly rich with the profit of it, but that Solomon might have those, in every district, who, having a dependence upon the court, would be serviceable to him and his interest as there was occasion. These commissioners of the victualling-office, not for the army or navy (Solomon was engaged in no war), but for the household, are here named, several of them only by their surnames, as great men commonly call their servants: *Ben-hur, Bendekar, &c.*, though several of them have also their proper names prefixed. Two of them married Solomon's daughters, Ben-Abinadab (v. 11) and Ahimaaz (v. 15), and no disparagement to them to marry men of business. Better match with the officers of their father's court that were Israelites than with the sons of princes that were strangers to the covenant of promise. The son of Geber was in Ramoth-Gilead (v. 19), and Geber himself was in the country of Sihon and Og, which included that and Mahanaim, v. 14. He is therefore said to be the only officer in that land, because the other two, mentioned c. 13, 14, depended on him, and were subordinate to him.

20 Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. 21 And Solomon



reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. 22 And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, 23 Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl. 24 For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him. 25 And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon. 26 And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. 27 And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing. 28 Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

Such a kingdom, and such a court, surely never any prince had, as Solomon's are here described to be.

1. Such a kingdom. Never did the crown of Israel shine so brightly as it did when Solomon wore it, never in his father's days, never in the days of any of his successors; nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah as it was then. The account here given of it is such as fully answers the prophecies which we have concerning it in Ps. lxxii, which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ. 1. The territories of his kingdom were large and its tributaries many; so it was foretold that he should *have dominion from sea to sea*, Ps. lxxii. 8—11. Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, who were his subjects by choice, but over all the neighbouring kingdoms, who were his subjects by constraint. All the princes from the river Euphrates north-east to the border of Egypt south-west, not only added to his honour by doing him homage and holding their crowns from him, but added to his wealth by serving him, and bringing him presents, v. 21. David, by his successful wars, compelled them to

this subjection, and Solomon, by his admirable wisdom, made it easy and reasonable; for it is fit that the fool should be *servant to the wise in heart*. If they gave him presents, he gave them instructions, and still *taught the people knowledge*, not only his own people, but those of other nations: and *wisdom is better than gold*. He had *peace on all sides*, v. 24. None of all the nations that were subject to him offered to shake off his yoke, or to give him any disturbance, but rather thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised that he shall have the *heathen for his inheritance* and that *princes shall worship him*, Isa. xlix. 6, 7; liii. 12. 2. The subjects of his kingdom, and its inhabitants, were many and cheerful. (1.) They were numerous and the country was exceedingly populous (v. 20): *Judah and Israel were many*, and that good land was sufficient to maintain them all. *They were as the sand of the sea in multitude*. Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham concerning the increase of his seed (Gen. xxii. 17), as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, Gen. xv. 18. This was their strength and beauty, the honour of their prince, the terror of their enemies, and an advancement of the wealth of the nation. If they grew so numerous that the place was any where too strait for them, they might remove with advantage into the countries that were subject to them. God's spiritual Israel are many, at least they will be so when they come all together, Rev. vii. 9. (2.) They were easy, they dwelt safely, or with confidence and assurance (v. 25), not jealous of their king or of his officers, not disaffected either to him or one to another, nor under any apprehension or danger from enemies foreign or domestic. They were happy and knew it, safe and willing to think themselves so. They dwelt every man under *his vine and fig-tree*. Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vineyards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king (1 Sam. viii. 14), but what they had they could call their own: he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of his property. Those that had vines and fig-trees ate the fruit of them themselves; and so great was the peace of the country that they might, if they pleased, dwell as safely under the shadow of them as within the walls of a city. Or, because it was usual to have *vines by the sides of their houses* (Ps. cxxviii. 3), they are said to *dwell under their vines*. (3.) They were cheerful in the use of their plenty, *eating and drinking, and making merry*, v. 20. Solomon did not only keep a good table himself, but enabled all his subjects, according to their rank, to do so too, and taught them that God gave them their abundance that they might use it soberly and pleasantly, not that they might hoard it

up. *There is nothing better than for a man to eat the labour of his hands* (Ecc. ii. 24), and that *with a merry heart*, Ecc. ix. 7. His father, in the Psalms, had led his people into the comforts of communion with God, and now he led them into the comfortable use of the good things of this life. This pleasant posture of Israel's affairs extended, in place, from Dan to Beer-sheba—no part of the country was exposed nor upon any account uneasy; and it continued a long time, *all the days of Solomon*, without any material interruption. Go where you would, you might see all the marks of plenty, peace, and satisfaction. The spiritual peace, and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus were typified by this. *The kingdom of God is not, as Solomon's was, meat and drink*, but, what is infinitely better, *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*.

II. Such a court Solomon kept as can scarcely be paralleled. We may guess at the vast number of his attendants, and the great resort there was to him, by the provision that was made daily for his table. Of bread there were so many measures of flour and meal as, it is computed, would richly serve 3000 men (Carellus computes above 4800 men), and the provision of flesh (*v. 23*) was rather more in proportion. What vast quantities were here of beef, mutton, and venison, and the choicest of all *fatted things*, as some read that which we translate *fatted fowl!* Ahasuerus, once in his reign, made a *great feast*, to show the riches of his kingdom, Esth. i. 3, 4. But it was much more the honour of Solomon that he kept a constant table and a very noble one, not of dainties or deceitful meats (he himself witnessed against them, Prov. xxiii. 3), but substantial food, for the entertainment of those who came to hear his wisdom. Thus Christ fed those whom he taught, 5000 at a time, more than ever Solomon's table would entertain at once: and all believers have in him a continual feast. Herein he far outdoes Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the bread that perishes, but *with that which endures to eternal life*. It added much both to the strength and glory of Solomon's kingdom that he had such abundance of horses, 40,000 for chariots and 12,000 for his troops, 1000 horse, perhaps, in every tribe, for the preserving of the public peace, *v. 26*. God had commanded that their king should not multiply horses (Deut. xvii. 16), nor, according to the account here given, considering the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, did he multiply horses in proportion to his neighbours; for we find even the Philistines bringing into the field 30,000 chariots (1 Sam. xiii. 5) and the Syrians at least 40,000 horse, 2 Sam. x. 18. The same officers that provided for his house provided also for his stable, *v. 27, 28*. Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without

confusion. Solomon, that had vast incomes, lived at a vast expense, and perhaps wrote that with application to himself, Ecc. v. 11. *When goods increase those are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes, unless withal they have the satisfaction of doing good with them?*

29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. 30 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. 32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth, and here we have a general account of it.

I. The fountain of his wisdom: *God gave it him, v. 29*. He owns it himself. Prov. ii. 6, *The Lord giveth wisdom*. He gives the powers of reason (Job xxxviii. 36), preserves and improves them. The ordinary advances of them are owing to his providence, the sanctification of them to his grace, and this extraordinary pitch at which they arrived in Solomon to a special grant of his favour to him in answer to prayer.

II. The fulness of it: *He had wisdom and understanding, exceeding much*, great knowledge of distant countries and the histories of former times, a quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had. It is called *largeness of heart*; for the heart is often put for the intellectual powers. He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying things together. Some, by his *largeness of heart*, understand his courage and boldness, and that great assurance with which he delivered his dictates and determinations. Or it may be meant of his disposition to do good with his knowledge. He was very free and communicative, had the gift of utterance as well as wisdom, was a

free of his learning as he was of his meat, and grudged neither to any that were about him. Note, It is very desirable that those who have large gifts of any kind should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; and this is *from the hand of God*, Eccl. ii. 24. He shall *enlarge the heart*, Ps. cxix. 32. The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the Greeks borrowed theirs; but the greatest scholars of these nations came short of Solomon, v. 30. If nature excels art, much more does grace. The knowledge which God gives by special favour goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men there were in Solomon's time, who were in great repute, particularly Heman, and others who were Levites, and employed by David in the temple-music, 1 Chron. xv. 19. Heman was *his seer in the word of God*, 1 Chron. xxv. 5. Chalcol and Darda were own brothers, and they also were noted for learning and wisdom. But *Solomon excelled them all* (v. 30), he out-did them and confounded them; his counsel was much more valuable.

III. The fame of it. It was talked of *in all nations round about*. His great wealth and glory made his wisdom much more illustrious, and gave him those opportunities of showing it which those cannot have that live in poverty and obscurity. The jewel of wisdom may receive great advantage by the setting of it.

IV. The fruits of it; by these the tree is known: he did not bury his talent, but showed his wisdom,

1. In his compositions. Those in divinity, written by divine inspiration, are not mentioned here, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end monuments of his wisdom, and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us *wise unto salvation*. But, besides these, it appears by what he spoke, or dictated to be written from him, (1.) That he was a moralist, and a man of great prudence, for he spoke 3000 *proverbs*, wise sayings, apophthegms, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. The world is much governed by proverbs, and was never better furnished with useful ones than by Solomon. Whether those proverbs of Solomon that we have were any part of the 3000 is uncertain. (2.) That he was a poet and a man of great wit: *His songs were 1005*, of which one only is extant, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his *Song of songs*. His wise instructions were communicated by proverbs, that they might be familiar to those whom he designed to teach and ready on all occasions, and by *songs*, that they might be pleasant and move the affections. (3.) That he was a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning and insight into the mysteries of nature. From his own and others' observations and expe-

rience, he wrote both of plants and animals (v. 33), descriptions of their natures and qualities, and (some think) of the medicinal use of them.

2. In his conversation. There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to *hear the wisdom of Solomon*, v. 34. Kings that had heard of it sent their ambassadors to hear it and to bring them instructions from it. Solomon's court was the staple of learning, and the rendezvous of philosophers, that is, the lovers of wisdom, who all came to light their candle at his lamp and to borrow from him. Let those who magnify the modern learning above that of the ancients produce such a treasure of knowledge any where in these latter ages as that was which Solomon was master of; yet this puts an honour upon human learning, that Solomon was praised for it, and recommends it to the great men of the earth, as well worthy their diligent search. But,

*Lastly*, Solomon was, herein, a type of Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and hidden for use; for he is *made of God to us wisdom*.

#### CHAP. V.

The great work which Solomon was raised up to do was the building of the temple; his wealth and wisdom were given him to qualify him for that. In this, especially, he was to be a type of Christ, for "he shall build the temple of the Lord," Zech. vi. 12. In this chapter we have an account of the preparations he made for that and his other buildings. Gold and silver his good father had prepared in abundance, but timber and stone he must get ready; and about these we have him treating with Hiram king of Tyre. I. Hiram congratulated him on his accession to the throne, ver. 1. II. Solomon signified to him his design to build the temple and desired him to furnish him with workmen, ver. 2-6. III. Hiram agreed to do it, ver. 7-9. IV. Solomon's work was accordingly well done and Hiram's workmen were well paid, ver. 10-18.

**A**ND Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. 2 And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, 3 Thou knowest how that David my father could not build a house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. 4 But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, *so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent*. 5 And, behold, I purpose to build a house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build a house unto my name. 6 Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my

servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that *there is* not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. 7 And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed *be* the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. 8 And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: *and* I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. 9 My servants shall bring *them* down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive *them*: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household.

We have here an account of the amicable correspondence between Solomon and Hiram. Tyre was a famous trading city, that lay close upon the sea, in the border of Israel; its inhabitants (as should seem) were none of the devoted nations, nor ever at enmity with Israel, and therefore David never offered to destroy them, but lived in friendship with them. It is here said of Hiram their king that he was *ever a lover of David*; and we have reason to think he was a worshipper of the true God, and had himself renounced, though he could not reform, the idolatry of his city. David's character will win the affections even of those that are without. Here is,

I. Hiram's embassy of compliment to Solomon, v. 1. He sent, as is usual among princes, to condole with him on the death of David, and to renew his alliances with him upon his succession to the government. It is good keeping up friendship and communion with the families in which religion is uppermost.

II. Solomon's embassy of business to Hiram, sent, it is likely, by messengers of his own. In wealth, honour, and power, Hiram was very much inferior to Solomon, yet Solomon had occasion to be beholden to him and begged his favour. Let us never look with disdain on those below us, because we know not how soon we may need them. Solomon, in his letter to Hiram, acquaints him,

1. With his design to build a temple to the honour of God. Some think that temples among the heathen took their first rise and

copy from the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness, and that there were none before that; however there were many houses built in honour of the false gods before this was built in honour of the God of Israel, so little is external splendour a mark of the true church. Solomon tells Hiram, who was himself no stranger to the affair, (1.) That David's wars were an obstruction to him, that he could not build this temple, though he designed it, v. 3. They took up much of his time, and thoughts, and cares, were a constant expense to him and a constant employment of his subjects; so that he could not do it so well as it must be done, and therefore, it not being essential to religion, he must leave it to be done by his successor. See what need we have to pray that God will *give peace in our time*, because, in time of war, the building of the gospel temple commonly goes on slowly. (2.) That peace gave him an opportunity to build it, and therefore he resolved to set about it immediately: *God has given me rest* both at home and abroad, and there is no adversary (v. 4), no *Satan* (so the word is), no instrument of Satan to oppose it, or to divert us from it. Satan does all he can to hinder temple work (1 Thess. ii. 18; Zech. iii. 1), but when he is bound (Rev. xx. 2) we should be busy. When there is *no evil occurrent*, then let us be vigorous and zealous in that which is good and get it forward. When the churches have rest let them be edified, Acts ix. 31. Days of peace and prosperity present us with a fair gale, which we must account for if we improve not. As God's providence excited Solomon to think of building the temple, by giving him wealth and leisure, so his promise encouraged him. God had told David that his *son should build him a house*, v. 5. He will take it as a pleasure to be thus employed, and will not lose the honour designed him by that promise. It may stir us up much to good undertakings to be assured of good success in them. Let God's promise quicken our endeavours.

2. With his desire that Hiram would assist him herein. Lebanon was the place whence timber must be had, a noble forest in the north of Canaan, particularly expressed in the grant of that land to Israel—*all Lebanon*, Josh. xiii. 5. So that Solomon was proprietor of all its productions. The *cedars of Lebanon* are spoken of as, in a special manner, the *planting of the Lord* (Ps. civ. 16), being designed for Israel's use and particularly for temple service. But Solomon owned that though the trees were his the Israelites had not *skill to hew timber* like the Sidonians, who were Hiram's subjects. Canaan was a *land of wheat and barley* (Deut. viii. 8), which employed Israel in the affairs of husbandry, so that they were not at all versed in manufactures: in them the Sidonians excelled. Israel, in the things of God, are a *wise and understanding people*; and yet, in curious

arts, inferior to their neighbours. True piety is a much more valuable gift of heaven than the highest degree of ingenuity. Better be an Israelite skilful in the law than a Sidonian skilful to hew timber. But, the case being thus, Solomon courts Hiram to send him workmen, and promises (v. 6) both to assist them (*my servants shall be with thy servants, to work under them*), and to pay them (*unto thee will I give hire for thy servants*); for the labourer, even in church-work, though it be indeed its own wages, is worthy of his hire. The evangelical prophet, foretelling the glory of the church in the days of the Messiah, seems to allude to this story, Isa. lx., where he prophesies, (1.) That the *sons of strangers* (such were the Tyrians and Sidonians) shall build up the wall of the gospel temple, v. 10. Ministers were raised up among the Gentiles for the edifying of the body of Christ. (2.) That the *glory of Lebanon* shall be brought to it to beautify it, v. 13. All external endowments and advantages shall be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom.

3. Hiram's reception of, and return to, this message.

(1.) He received it with great satisfaction to himself: He rejoiced greatly (v. 7) that Solomon trod in his father's steps, and carried on his designs, and was likely to be so great a blessing to his kingdom. In this Hiram's generous spirit rejoiced, and not merely in the prospect he had of making an advantage to himself by Solomon's employing him. What he had the pleasure of he gave God the praise of: *Blessed be the Lord, who has given to David* (who was himself a wise man) *a wise son to rule over this great people*. See here, [1.] With what pleasure Hiram speaks of Solomon's wisdom and the extent of his dominion. Let us learn not to envy others either those secular advantages or those endowments of the mind wherein they excel us. What a great comfort it is to those that wish well to the Israel of God to see religion and wisdom kept up in families from one generation to another, especially in great families and those that have great influence on others! where it is so, God must have the glory of it. If to godly parents be given a godly seed (Mal. ii. 15), it is a token for good, and a happy indication that the entail of the blessing shall not be cut off.

(2.) He answered it with great satisfaction to Solomon, granting him what he desired, and showing himself very forward to assist him in this great and good work to which he was laying his hand. We have here his articles of agreement with Solomon concerning this affair, in which we may observe Hiram's prudence. [1.] He deliberated upon the proposal, before he returned an answer (v. 8): *I have considered the things*. It is common for those that make bargains rashly afterwards to wish them unmade again. The virtuous woman considers a field and then buys it, Prov. xxxi. 16. Those do not lose

time who take time to consider. [2.] He descended to particulars in the articles, that there might be no misunderstanding afterwards, to occasion a quarrel. Solomon had spoken of hewing the trees (v. 6), and Hiram agrees to what he desired concerning that (v. 8); but nothing had been said concerning carriage, and this matter therefore must be settled. Land-carriage would be very troublesome and chargeable; he therefore undertakes to bring all the timber down from Lebanon by sea, a coasting voyage. Conveyance by water is a great convenience to trade, for which God is to have praise, who taught man that discretion. Observe what a definite bargain Hiram made. Solomon must appoint the place where the timber shall be delivered, and thither Hiram will undertake to bring it and be responsible for its safety. As the Sidonians excelled the Israelites in timber-work, so they did in sailing; for Tyre and Sidon were situate at the entry of the sea (Ezek. xxvii. 3): they therefore were fittest to take care of the water-carriage. *Tractant fabricia fabri—Every artist has his trade assigned*. And, [3.] If Hiram undertake for the work, and do all Solomon's desire concerning the timber (v. 8), he justly expects that Solomon shall undertake for the wages: "*Thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household* (v. 9), not only for the workmen, but for my own family." If Tyre supply Israel with craftsmen, Israel will supply Tyre with corn, Ezek. xxvii. 17. Thus, by the wise disposal of Providence, one country has need of another and is benefited by another, that there may be mutual correspondence and dependence, to the glory of God our common parent.

10 So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. 11 And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. 12 And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together. 13 And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. 14 And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy. 15 And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains; 16 Beside the chief of Solomon's officers

which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work. 17 And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. 18 And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

Here is, I. The performance of the agreement between Solomon and Hiram. Each of the parties made good his engagement. 1. Hiram delivered Solomon the timber, according to his bargain, v. 10. The trees were Solomon's, but perhaps—*Materiam superabat opus—The workmanship was of more value than the article.* Hiram is therefore said to deliver the trees. 2. Solomon conveyed to Hiram the corn which he had promised him, v. 11. Thus let justice be followed (as the expression is, Deut. xvi. 20), justice on both sides, in every bargain.

II. The confirmation of the friendship that was between them hereby. *God gave Solomon wisdom* (v. 12), which was more and better than any thing Hiram did or could give him; but this made Hiram love him, and enabled Solomon to improve his kindness, so that they were both willing to ripen their mutual love into a mutual league, that it might be lasting. It is wisdom to strengthen our friendship with those whom we find to be honest and fair, lest new friends prove not so firm and so kind as old ones.

III. The labourers whom Solomon employed in preparing materials for the temple. 1. Some were Israelites, who were employed in the more easy and honourable part of the work, felling trees and helping to square them, in conjunction with Hiram's servants; for this he appointed 30,000, but employed only 10,000 at a time, so that for one month's work they had two months' vacation, both for rest and for the despatch of their own affairs at home, v. 13, 14. It was temple service, yet Solomon takes care that they shall not be over-worked. Great men ought to consider that their servants must rest as well as they. 2. Others were captives of other nations, who were to bear burdens and to hew stone (v. 15), and we read not that these had their resting times as the other had, for they were doomed to servitude. 3. There were some employed as directors and overseers (v. 16), 3300 that ruled over the people, and they were as necessary and useful in their place as the labourers in theirs; here were many hands and many eyes employed, for preparation was now to be made, not only for the temple, but for all the rest of Solomon's buildings, at Jerusalem, and

here in the forest of Lebanon, and in other places of his dominion, of which see *ch. ix. 17—19.* He speaks of the vastness of his undertakings (Eccl. ii. 4, *I made me great works*), which required this vast number of workmen.

IV. The laying of the foundation of the temple; for that is the building his heart is chiefly upon, and therefore he begins with that, v. 17, 18. It should seem, Solomon was himself present, and president, at the founding of the temple, and that the first stone (as has been usual in famous buildings) was laid with some solemnity. *Solomon commanded and they brought costly stones for the foundation; he would do every thing like himself, generously, and therefore would have some of the costliest stones laid, or buried rather, in the foundation, though, being out of sight, worse might have served.* Christ, who is laid for a foundation, is an elect and precious stone (Isa. xxviii. 16), and the foundations of the church are said to be *laid with sapphires*, Isa. liv. 11, compare Rev. xxi. 19. That sincerity which is our gospel perfection obliges us to lay our foundation firm and to bestow most pains on that part of our religion which lies out of the sight of men.

## CHAP. VI.

Great and long preparation had been making for the building of the temple, and here, at length, comes an account of the building of it; a noble piece of work it was, one of the wonders of the world, and, taking in its spiritual signification, one of the glories of the church. Here is, I. The time when it was built (ver. 1), and how long it was in the building, ver. 37, 38. II. The silence with which it was built, ver. 7. III. The dimensions of it, ver. 2, 3. IV. The message God sent to Solomon, when it was in the building, ver. 11—15. V. The particulars: windows (ver. 4), chambers (ver. 5, 6, 8—10), the walls and flooring (ver. 15—18), the oracle (ver. 19—22), the cherubim (ver. 23—30), the doors (ver. 31—35), and the inner court, ver. 36. Many learned men have well bestowed their pains in expounding the description here given of the temple according to the rules of architecture, and solving the difficulties which, upon search, they find in it; but in that matter, having nothing new to offer, we will not be particular or curious; it was then well understood, and every man's eyes that saw this glorious structure furnished him with the best critical exposition of this chapter.

AND it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. 2 And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits. 3 And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house. 4 And for the house he made windows of narrow lights. 5 And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about,

against the walls of the house round about, *both* of the temple and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about: 6 The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without *in the wall* of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that *the beams* should not be fastened in the walls of the house. 7 And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax *nor* any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building. 8 The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third. 9 So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. 10 And *then* he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar.

Here, I. The temple is called *the house of the Lord* (v. 1), because it was, 1. Directed and modelled by him. Infinite Wisdom was the architect, and gave David the plan or pattern by the Spirit, not by word of mouth only, but, for the greater certainty and exactness, in writing (1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12), as he had given to Moses in the mount a draught of the tabernacle. 2. Dedicated and devoted to him and to his honour, to be employed in his service, so his as never any other house was, for he manifested his glory in it (so as never in any other) in a way agreeable to that dispensation; for, when there were carnal ordinances, there was a *worldly sanctuary*, Heb ix. 1, 10. This gave it its *beauty of holiness*, that it was *the house of the Lord*, which far transcended all its other beauties.

II. The time when it began to be built is exactly set down. 1. It was just 480 years after the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt. Allowing forty years to Moses, seventeen to Joshua, 299 to the Judges, forty to Eli, forty to Samuel and Saul, forty to David, and four to Solomon before he began the work, we have just the sum of 480. So long it was after that holy state was founded before that holy house was built, which, in less than 430 years, was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar. It was thus deferred because Israel had, by their sins, rendered

themselves unworthy of this honour, and because God would show how little he values external pomp and splendour in his service: he was in no haste for a temple. David's tent, which was clean and convenient, though it was neither stately nor rich, nor, for aught that appears, ever consecrated, is called *the house of the Lord* (2 Sam. xii. 20), and served as well as Solomon's temple; yet, when God gave Solomon great wealth, he put it into his heart thus to employ it, and graciously accepted him, chiefly because it was to be a shadow of good things to come, Heb. ix. 9. 2. It was in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the first three years being taken up in settling the affairs of his kingdom, that he might not find any embarrassment from them in this work. It is not time lost which is spent in composing ourselves for the work of God, and disentangling ourselves from every thing which might distract or divert us. During this time he was adding to the preparations which his father had made (1 Chron. xxii. 14), hewing the stone, squaring the timber, and getting every thing ready, so that he is not to be blamed for slackness in deferring it so long. We are truly serving God when we are preparing for his service and furnishing ourselves for it.

III. The materials are brought in, ready for their place (v. 7), so ready that there was *neither hammer nor ax heard in the house while it was in building*. In all building Solomon prescribes it as a rule of prudence to *prepare the work in the field*, and afterwards *build*, Prov. xxiv. 27. But here, it seems, the preparation was more than ordinarily full and exact, to such a degree that, when the several parts came to be put together, there was nothing defective to be added, nothing amiss to be amended. It was to be the temple of the God of peace, and therefore no iron tool must be heard in it. Quietness and silence both become and befriend religious exercises: God's work should be done with as much care and as little noise as may be. The temple was thrown down with axes and hammers, and those that threw it down roared *in the midst of the congregation* (Ps. lxxiv. 4, 6); but it was built up in silence. Clamour and violence often hinder the work of God, but never further it.

IV. The dimensions are laid down (v. 2, 3) according to the rules of proportion. Some observe that the length and breadth were just double to that of the tabernacle. Now that Israel had grown more numerous the place of their meeting needed to be enlarged (Isa. liv. 1, 2), and now that they had grown richer they were the better able to enlarge it. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap so.

V. An account of the windows (v. 4): They were *broad within, and narrow without, Marg.* Such should the eyes of our mind be, reflecting nearer on ourselves than on other people, looking much within, to judge

ourselves, but little without, to censure our brethren. The narrowness of the lights intimated the darkness of that dispensation, in comparison with the gospel day.

Vl. The chambers are described (v. 5, 6), which served as vestries, in which the utensils of the tabernacle were carefully laid up, and where the priests dressed and undressed themselves and left the clothes in which they ministered: probably in some of these chambers they feasted upon the holy things. Solomon was not so intent upon the magnificence of the house as to neglect the conveniences that were requisite for the offices thereof, that every thing might be done decently and in order. Care was taken that the beams should not be fastened in the walls to weaken them, v. 6. Let not the church's strength be impaired under pretence of adding to its beauty or convenience.

II And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, 12 *Concerning* this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father: 13 And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. 14 So Solomon built the house, and finished it.

Here is, I. The word God sent to Solomon, when he was engaged in building the temple. God let him know that he took notice of what he was doing, *the house he was now building*, v. 12. None employ themselves for God without having his eye upon them. "I know thy works, thy good works." He assured him that if he would proceed and persevere in obedience to the divine law, and keep in the way of duty and the true worship of God, the divine loving-kindness should be drawn out both to himself (*I will perform my word with thee*) and to his kingdom: "Israel shall be ever owned as my people; I will dwell among them, and not forsake them." This word God sent him probably by a prophet, 1. That by the promise he might be encouraged and comforted in his work. Perhaps sometimes the great care, expense, and fatigue of it, made him ready to wish he had never begun it; but this would help him through the difficulties of it, that the promised establishment of his family and kingdom would abundantly recompense all his pains. An eye to the promise will carry us cheerfully through our work; and those who wish well to the public will think nothing too much that they can do to secure and perpetuate to it the tokens of God's presence. 2. That, by the condition annexed, he might be awakened to consider that though he built

the temple ever so strong the glory of it would soon depart, unless he and his people continued to walk in God's statutes. God plainly let him know that all this charge which he and his people were at, in erecting this temple, would neither excuse them from obedience to the law of God nor shelter them from his judgments in case of disobedience. Keeping God's commandments is better, and more pleasing to him, than building churches.

II. The work Solomon did for God: *So he built the house* (v. 14), so animated by the message God had sent him, so admonished not to expect that God should own his building unless he were obedient to his laws: "Lord, I proceed upon these terms, being firmly resolved to walk in thy statutes." The strictness of God's government will never drive a good man from his service, but quicken him in it. Solomon built and finished, he went on with the work, and God went along with him till it was completed. It is spoken both to God's praise and his: he grew not weary of the work, met not with any obstructions (as Ezra iv. 24), did not out-build his property, nor do it by halves, but, having begun to build, was both able and willing to finish; for he was a wise builder.

15 And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling: and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir. 16 And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place. 17 And the house, that is the temple before it, was forty cubits long. 18 And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers: all was cedar; there was no stone seen. 19 And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 20 And the oracle in the forepart was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold; and so covered the altar which was of cedar. 21 So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold. 22 And



the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that *was* by the oracle he overlaid with gold. 23 And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, *each* ten cubits high. 24 And five cubits *was* the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other *were* ten cubits. 25 And the other cherub *was* ten cubits: both the cherubims *were* of one measure and one size. 26 The height of the one cherub *was* ten cubits, and so *was* it of the other cherub. 27 And he set the cherubims within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the *one* wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. 28 And he overlaid the cherubims with gold. 29 And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without. 30 And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without. 31 And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree: the lintel *and* side posts *were* a fifth part of the wall. 32 The two doors also *were* of olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid *them* with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm trees. 33 So also made he for the door of the temple posts of olive tree, a fourth part of the wall. 34 And the two doors *were* of fir tree: the two leaves of the one door *were* folding, and the two leaves of the other door *were* folding. 35 And he carved *thereon* cherubims and palm trees and open flowers: and covered *them* with gold fitted upon the carved work. 36 And he built the inner court with three rows of hewed stone, and a row of cedar beams. 37 In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the

LORD laid, in the month Zif: 38 And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which *is* the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it.

Here, 1. We have a particular account of the details of the building.

1. The wainscot of the temple. It was of cedar (*v.* 15), which was strong and durable, and of a very sweet smell. The wainscot was curiously carved with knops (like eggs or apples) and flowers, no doubt as the fashion then was, *v.* 18.

2. The gilding. It was not like ours, washed over, but *the whole house*, all the inside of the temple (*v.* 22), even the floor (*v.* 30), he overlaid with gold, and the most holy place with *pure gold*, *v.* 21. Solomon would spare no expense necessary to make it every way sumptuous. Gold was under foot there, as it should be in all the living temples: the abundance of it lessened its worth.

3. The oracle, or *speaking-place* (for so the word signifies), *the holy of holies*, so called because thence God spoke to Moses, and perhaps to the high priest, when he consulted with the breast-plate of judgment. In this place *the ark of the covenant was to be set*, *v.* 19. Solomon made every thing new, and more magnificent than it had been, except the ark, which was still the same that Moses made, with its mercy-seat and cherubim; that was the token of God's presence, which is always the same with his people whether they meet in tent or temple, and changes not with their condition.

4. The cherubin. Besides those at the ends of the mercy-seat, which covered the ark, (1.) Solomon set up two more, very large ones, images of young men (as some think), with wings made of olive-wood, and all overlaid with gold, *v.* 23, &c. This most holy place was much larger than that in the tabernacle, and therefore the ark would have seemed lost in it, and the dead wall would have been unsightly, if it had not been thus adorned. (2.) He carved cherubin upon all the walls of the house, *v.* 29. The heathen set up images of their gods and worshipped them; but these were designed to represent the servants and attendants of the God of Israel, the holy angels, not to be themselves worshipped (*see thou do it not*), but to show how great he is whom we are to worship.

5. The doors. The folding doors that led into the oracle were but a fifth part of the wall (*v.* 31), those into the temple were a fourth part (*v.* 33); but both were beautified with cherubin engraven on them, *v.* 32, 35.

6. The inner court, in which the brazen altar was at which the priests ministered. This was separated from the court where the people were by a low wall, three rows of

hewn stone tipped with a cornice of cedar (c. 36), that over it the people might see what was done and hear what the priests said to them; for, even under that dispensation, they were not kept wholly either in the dark or at a distance.

7. The time spent in this building. It was but seven years and a half from the founding to the finishing of it, c. 38. Considering the vastness and elegance of the building, and the many appurtenances to it which were necessary to fit it for use, it was soon done. Solomon was in earnest in it, had money enough, had nothing to divert him from it, and many hands made quick work. He finished it (as the margin reads it) with all the appurtenances thereof, and with all the ordinances thereof, not only built the place, but set forward the work for which it was built.

II. Let us now see what was typified by this temple. 1. Christ is the true temple; he himself spoke of the temple of his body, John ii. 21. God himself prepared him his body, Heb. x. 5. *In him dwell the fulness of the Godhead*, as the *Shechinah* in the temple. In him meet all God's spiritual Israel. Through him we have access with confidence to God. All the angels of God, those blessed cherubim, have a charge to worship him. 2. Every believer is a living temple, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, 1 Cor. iii. 16. Even the body is such by virtue of its union with the soul, 1 Cor. vi. 19. We are not only wonderfully made by the divine providence, but more wonderfully made anew by the divine grace. This living temple is built upon Christ as its foundation and will be perfected in due time. 3. The gospel church is the mystical temple; it grows to a *holy temple in the Lord* (Eph. ii. 21), enriched and beautified with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, as Solomon's temple with gold and precious stones. Only Jews built the tabernacle, but Gentiles joined with them in building the temple. Even strangers and foreigners are built up a *habitation of God*, Eph. ii. 19, 22. The temple was divided into the holy place and the most holy, the courts of it into the outer and inner; so there are the visible and the invisible church. The door into the temple was wider than that into the oracle. Many enter into profession that come short of salvation. This temple is built firm, upon a rock, not to be taken down as the tabernacle of the Old Testament was. The temple was long in preparing, but was built at last. The top-stone of the gospel church will, at length, be brought forth with shoutings, and it is a pity that there should be the clashing of axes and hammers in the building of it. Angels are ministering spirits, attending the church on all sides and all the members of it. 4. Heaven is the everlasting temple. There the church will be fixed, and no longer movable. The streets of the new Jerusalem,

in allusion to the flooring of the temple, are said to be of *pure gold*, Rev. xxi. 21. The cherubim there always attend the throne of glory. The temple was uniform, and in heaven there is the perfection of beauty and harmony. In Solomon's temple there was no noise of axes and hammers. Every thing is quiet and serene in heaven; all that shall be stones in that building must in the present state of probation and preparation be fitted and made ready for it, must be hewn and squared by divine grace, and so made meet for a place there.

## CHAP. VII.

As, in the story of David, one chapter of wars and victories follows another, so, in the story of Solomon, one chapter concerning his buildings follows another. In this chapter we have, 1. His fitting up several buildings for himself and his own use, ver. 1—12. 11. His furnishing the temple which he had built for God, 1. With two pillars, ver. 13—22. 2. With a molten sea, ver. 23—26. 3. With ten basins of brass (ver. 27—37), and ten layers upon them, ver. 38, 39. 4. With all the other utensils of the temple, ver. 40—50. 5. With the things that his father had dedicated, ver. 51. The particular description of these things was not needless when it was written, nor is it now useless.

**B**UT Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. 2 He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof *was* a hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. 3 And *it was* covered with cedar above upon the beams, that *lay* on forty five pillars, fifteen *in* a row. 4 And *there were* windows *in* three rows, and light *was* against light *in* three ranks. 5 And all the doors and posts *were* square, with the windows: and light *was* against light *in* three ranks. 6 And he made a porch of pillars; the length thereof *was* fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits: and the porch *was* before them: and the *other* pillars and the thick beam *were* before them. 7 Then he made a porch for the throne where he might judge, *even* the porch of judgment: and *it was* covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the other. 8 And his house where he dwelt *had* another court within the porch, *which was* of the like work. Solomon made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken *to wife*, like unto this porch. 9 All these *were* of costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the

outside toward the great court. 10 And the foundation *was of* costly stones, even great stones stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. 11 And above *were* costly stones, after the measures of hewed stones, and cedars. 12 And the great court round about *was* with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams, both for the inner court of the house of the LORD, and for the porch of the house.

Never had any man so much of the spirit of building as Solomon had, nor to better purpose; he began with the temple, built for God first, and then all his other buildings were comfortable. The surest foundations of lasting prosperity are those which are laid in an early piety, Matt. vi. 33. 1. He built a house for himself (v. 1), *where he dwelt*, v. 8. His father had built a good house; but it was no reflection upon his father for him to build a better, in proportion to the estate wherewith God had blessed him. Much of the comfort of this life is connected with an agreeable house. He was thirteen years building this house, whereas he built the temple in little more than seven years; not that he was more exact, but less eager and intent, in building his own house than in building God's. He was in no haste for his own palace, but impatient till the temple was finished and fit for use. Thus we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction. 2. He built *the house of the forest at Lebanon* (v. 2), supposed to be a country seat near Jerusalem, so called from the pleasantness of its situation and the trees that encompassed it. I rather incline to think that it was a house built in the forest of Lebanon itself, whither (though far distant from Jerusalem) Solomon (having so many chariots and horses, and those dispersed into chariot-cities, which probably were his stages) might frequently retire with ease. It does not appear that his throne (mentioned v. 7) was at the house of the forest of Lebanon, and it was not at all improper to put his shields there as in a magazine. Express notice is taken of his buildings, not only in Jerusalem, but in Lebanon (ch. ix. 19), and we read of the tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus (Cant. vii. 4), which probably was part of this house. A particular account is given of this house, that being built in Lebanon, a place famed for cedars, the pillars, and beams, and roof, were all cedar (v. 2, 3), and, being designed for pleasant prospects, there were three tiers of windows on each side, *light against light* (v. 4, 5), or, as it may be read, *prospect against prospect*. Those whose lot is cast in the country may be well reconciled to a country life by this, that some of the greatest princes have thought those the

most pleasant of their days which they have spent in their country retirements. 3. He built piazzas before one of his houses, either that at Jerusalem or that in Lebanon, which were very famous—a porch of pillars (v. 6), perhaps for an exchange or a guard-house, or for those to walk in that attended him about business till they could have audience, or for state and magnificence. He himself speaks of Wisdom's building her house, and *hewing out her seven pillars* (Prov. ix. 1), for the shelter of those that, three verses before (ch. viii. 34), are said to *watch daily at her gates and to wait at the posts of her doors*. 4. At his house where he dwelt in Jerusalem he built a great hall, or porch of judgment, where was set the throne, or king's bench, for the trial of causes, in which he himself was appealed to (*placita coram ipso rege tenenda—causes were to be adjusted in the king's presence*), and this was richly wainscoted with cedar, from the floor to the roof, v. 7. He had there also *another court within the porch*, nearer his house, of similar work, for his attendants to walk in, v. 8. 5. He built a house for his wife, where she kept her court, v. 8. It is said to be *like the porch*, because built of cedar like it, though not in the same form; this, no doubt, was nearer adjoining to his own palace, yet perhaps if it had been as near as it ought to have been Solomon would not have multiplied wives as he did.

The wonderful magnificence of all these buildings is taken notice of, v. 9, &c. All the materials were the best of their kind. The foundation-stones were costly for their size, four or five yards square, or at least so many yards long (v. 10), and the stones of the building were costly for the workmanship, hewn and sawn, and in all respects finely wrought, v. 9, 11. The court of his own house was like that of the temple (v. 12, compare ch. vi. 36), so well did he like the model of God's courts that he made his own by it.

13 And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. 14 He *was* a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father *was* a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. 15 For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about. 16 And he made two chapters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapter *was* five cubits, and the height of the

other chapter *was* five cubits: 17 And nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain work, for the chapters which *were* upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapter, and seven for the other chapter. 18 And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the chapters that *were* upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapter. 19 And the chapters that *were* upon the top of the pillars *were* of lily work in the porch, four cubits. 20 And the chapters upon the two pillars *had pomegranates* also above, over against the belly which *was* by the network: and the pomegranates *were* two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapter. 21 And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jaclin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. 22 And upon the top of the pillars *was* lily work: so *was* the work of the pillars finished. 23 And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other; *it was* round all about, and his height *was* five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 24 And under the brim of it round about *there were* knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the knops *were* cast in two rows, when it *was* cast. 25 It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea *was set* above upon them, and all their hinder parts *were* inward. 26 And it *was* a handbreadth thick, and the brim thereof *was* wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: it contained two thousand baths. 27 And he made ten bases of brass; four cubits *was* the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it. 28 And the work of the bases *was* on this manner: they had borders, and the borders *were*

between the ledges: 29 And on the borders that *were* between the ledges *were* lions, oxen, and cherubims: and upon the ledges *there was* a base above: and beneath the lions and oxen *were* certain additions made of thin work. 30 And every base had four brassen wheels, and plates of brass: and the four corners thereof had undersettors: under the laver *were* undersettors molten, at the side of every addition. 31 And the mouth of it within the chapter and above *was* a cubit: but the mouth thereof *was* round *after* the work of the base, a cubit and a half: and also upon the mouth of it *were* gravings with their borders, foursquare, not round. 32 And under the borders *were* four wheels; and the axletrees of the wheels *were joined* to the base: and the height of a wheel *was* a cubit and half a cubit. 33 And the work of the wheels *was* like the work of a chariot wheel: their axletrees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes, *were* all molten. 34 And *there were* four undersettors to the four corners of one base: and the undersettors *were* of the very base itself. 25 And in the top of the base *was there* a round compass of half a cubit high: and on the top of the base the ledges thereof and the borders thereof *were* of the same. 36 For on the plates of the ledges thereof, and on the borders thereof, he graved cherubims, lions, and palm trees, according to the proportion of every one, and additions round about. 37 After this manner he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, and one size. 38 Then made he ten lavers of brass: one laver contained forty baths: and every laver *was* four cubits: and upon every one of the ten bases one laver. 39 And he put five bases on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house: and he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward over against the south. 40 And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made

king Solomon for the house of the LORD: 41 The two pillars, and the two bowls of the chapiters that were on the top of the two pillars; and the two networks, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; 42 And four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, even two rows of pomegranates for one network, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters that were upon the pillars; 43 And the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases; 44 And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea; 45 And the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, were of bright brass. 46 In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan. 47 And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were exceeding many: neither was the weight of the brass found out.

We have here an account of the brass-work about the temple. There was no iron about the temple, though we find David preparing for the temple iron for things of iron, 1 Chron. xxix. 2. What those things were we are not told, but some of the things of brass are here described and the rest mentioned.

I. The brasier whom Solomon employed to preside in this part of the work was Hiram, or Hiram (2 Chron. iv. 11), who was by his mother's side an Israelite, of the tribe of Naphtali, by his father's side a man of Tyre, v. 14. If he had the ingenuity of a Tyrian, and the affection of an Israelite to the house of God (the head of a Tyrian and the heart of an Israelite), it was happy that the blood of the two nations mixed in him, for thereby he was qualified for the work to which he was designed. As the tabernacle was built with the wealth of Egypt, so the temple with the wit of Tyre. God will serve himself by the common gifts of the children of men.

II. The brass he made use of was the best he could get. All the brazen vessels were of bright brass (v. 45), good brass, so the Chaldee, that which was strongest and looked finest. God, who is the best, must be served and honoured with the best.

III. The place where all the brazen vessels were cast was the plain of Jordan, because the ground there was stiff and clayey, fit to make moulds of for the casting of the brass (v. 46), and Solomon would not have

this dirty smokywork done in or near Jerusalem.

IV. The quantity was not accounted for. The vessels were unnumbered (so it may be read (v. 47) as well as unweighed), because they were exceedingly numerous, and it would have been an endless thing to keep the account of them; neither was the weight of the brass, when it was delivered to the workmen, searched or enquired into; so honest were the workmen, and such great plenty of brass they had, that there was no danger of wanting. We must ascribe it to Solomon's care that he provided so much, not to his carelessness that he kept no account of it.

V. Some particulars of the brass-work are described.

1. Two brazen pillars, which were set up in the porch of the temple (v. 21), whether under the cover of the porch or in the open air is not certain; it was between the temple and the court of the priests. These pillars were neither to hang gates upon nor to rest any building upon, but purely for ornament and significancy. (1.) What an ornament they were we may gather from the account here given of the curious work that was about them, chequer-work, chain-work, network, lily-work, and pomegranates in rows, and all of bright brass, and framed no doubt according to the best rules of proportion, to please the eye. (2.) Their significancy is intimated in the names given them (v. 21): *Jachin*—he will establish; and *Boaz*—in him is strength. Some think they were intended for memorials of the pillar of cloud and fire which led Israel through the wilderness: I rather think them designed for memorandums to the priests and others that came to worship at God's door, [1.] To depend upon God only, and not upon any sufficiency of their own, for strength and establishment in all their religious exercises. When we come to wait upon God, and find our hearts wandering and unfixed, then by faith let us fetch in help from heaven: *Jachin*—God will fix this roving mind. *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.* We find ourselves weak and unable for holy duties, but this is our encouragement: *Boaz*—in him is our strength, who works in us both to will and to do. *I will go in the strength of the Lord God.* Spiritual strength and stability are to be had at the door of God's temple, where we must wait for the gifts of grace in the use of the means of grace. [2.] It was a memorandum to them of the strength and establishment of the temple of God among them. Let them keep close to God and duty, and they should never lose their dignities and privileges, but the grant should be confirmed and perpetuated to them. The gospel church is what God will establish, what he will strengthen, and what the gates of hell can never prevail against. But, with respect to this temple, when it was destroyed particular notice was taken of the destroyed

of these pillars (2 Kings xxv. 13, 17), which had been the tokens of its establishment, and would have been so if they had not forsaken God.

2. A brazen sea, a very large vessel, above five yards in diameter, and which contained above 500 barrels of water for the priests' use, in washing themselves and the sacrifices, and keeping the courts of the temple clean, v. 23, &c. It stood raised upon the figures of twelve oxen in brass, so high that either they must have stairs to climb up to it or cocks at the bottom to draw water from it. The Gibeonites, or Nethinim, who were to draw water for the house of God, had the care of filling it. Some think Solomon made the images of oxen to support this great cistern in contempt of the golden calf which Israel had worshipped, that (as bishop Patrick expresses it) the people might see there was nothing worthy of adoration in those figures; they were fitter to make posts of than to make gods of. Yet this prevailed not to prevent Jerusalem's setting up the calves for deities. In the court of the tabernacle there was only a laver of brass provided to wash in, but in the court of the temple a sea of brass, intimating that by the gospel of Christ much fuller preparation is made for our cleansing than was by the law of Moses. That had a laver, this has a sea, a fountain opened, Zech. xiii. 1.

3. Ten bases, or stands, or settles, of brass, on which were put ten lavers, to be filled with water for the service of the temple, because there would not be room at the molten sea for all that had occasion to wash there. The bases on which the lavers were fixed are very largely described here, v. 27, &c. They were curiously adorned and set upon wheels, that the lavers might be removed as there was occasion; but ordinarily they stood in two rows, five on one side of the court and five on the other, v. 39. Each laver contained forty baths, that is, about ten barrels, v. 38. Those must be very clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. Spiritual priests and spiritual sacrifices must be washed in the laver of Christ's blood and of regeneration. We must wash often, for we daily contract pollution, must cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. Plentiful provision is made for our cleansing; so that if we have our lot for ever among the unclean it will be our own fault.

4. Besides these, there was a vast number of brass pots made to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings in, which the priests and offerers were to feast upon before the Lord (see 1 Sam. ii. 14); also shovels, wherewith they took out the ashes of the altar. Some think the word signifies *flesh-hooks*, with which they took meat out of the pot. The basins also were made of brass, to receive the blood of the sacrifices. These are put for all the utensils of the brazen altar, Exod. xxxviii. 3. While they were about it they

made abundance of them, that they might have a good stock by them when those that were first in use wore out and went to decay. Thus Solomon, having wherewithal to do so, provided for posterity.

48 And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the LORD: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the show-bread was, 49 And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold, 50 And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold: and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple. 51 So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

Here is, 1. The making of the gold work of the temple, which it seems was done last, for with it the work of the house of God ended. All within doors was gold, and all made new (except the ark, with its mercy-seat and cherubim), the old being either melted down or laid by—the golden altar, table, and candlestick, with all their appurtenances. The altar of incense was still one, for Christ and his intercession are so: but he made ten golden tables, 2 Chron. iv. 8 (though here mention is made of that one only on which the show-bread was (v. 48), which we may suppose was larger than the rest and to which the rest were as sideboards), and ten golden candlesticks (v. 49), intimating the much greater plenty both of spiritual food and heavenly light which the gospel blesses us with than the law of Moses did or could afford. Even the hinges of the door were of gold (v. 50), that every thing might be alike magnificent, and bespeak Solomon's generosity. Some suggest that every thing was made thus splendid in God's temple to keep the people from idolatry, for none of the idol-temples were so rich and fine as this: but how little the expedient availed the event showed. 2. The bringing in of the dedicated things, which David had devoted to the honour of God, v. 51. What was not expended in the building and furniture was laid up in the treasury, for repairs, exigencies, and the constant charge of the temple-service. What the parents have

dedicated to God the children ought by no means to alienate or recal, but should cheerfully devote what was intended for pious and charitable uses, that they may, with their estates, inherit the blessing.

## CHAP. VIII.

The building and furniture of the temple were very glorious, but the dedication of it exceeds in glory as much as prayer and praise, the work of saints, exceed the casting of metal and the graving of stones, the work of the craftsman. The temple was designed for the keeping up of the correspondence between God and his people; and here we have an account of the solemnity of their first meeting there. I. The representatives of all Israel were called together (ver. 1, 2), to keep a feast to the honour of God, for fourteen days, ver. 63. II. The priests brought the ark into the most holy place, and fixed it there, ver. 3-9. III. God took possession of it by a cloud, ver. 10, 11. IV. Solomon, with thankful acknowledgments to God, informed the people touching the occasion of their meeting, ver. 12-21. V. In a long prayer he recommended to God's gracious acceptance all the prayers that should be made up or towards this place, ver. 22-53. VI. He dismissed the assembly with a blessing and an exhortation, ver. 54-51. VII. He offered abundance of sacrifices, on which he and his people feasted, and so parted, with great satisfaction, ver. 62-66. These were Israel's golden days, days of the Son of man in type.

**T**HEN Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4 And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. 5 And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 6 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. 7 For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 8 And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day. 9 There was nothing in the ark save

the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

The temple, though richly beautified, yet while it was without the ark was like a body without a soul, or a candlestick without a candle, or (to speak more properly) a house without an inhabitant. All the cost and pains bestowed on this stately structure are lost if God do not accept them; and, unless he please to own it as the place where he will record his name, it is after all but a ruinous heap. When therefore *all the work* is ended (*ch. vii. 51*), the *one thing needful* is yet behind, and that is the bringing in of the ark. This therefore is the end which must crown the work, and which here we have an account of the doing of with great solemnity.

I. Solomon presides in this service, as David did in the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem; and neither of them thought it below him to follow the ark nor to lead the people in their attendance on it. Solomon glories in the title of the *preacher* (*Eccl. i. 1*), and the *master of assemblies*, *Eccl. xii. 11*. This great assembly he summons (*v. 1*), and he is the centre of it, for to him they all assembled (*v. 2*) at the feast in the seventh month, namely, the feast of tabernacles, which was appointed on the fifteenth day of that month, *Lev. xxiii. 34*. David, like a very good man, brings the ark to a convenient place, near him; Solomon, like a very great man, brings it to a magnificent place. As every man has received the gift, so let him minister; and let children proceed in God's service where their parents left off.

II. All Israel attend the service, their judges and the chief of their tribes and families, all their officers, civil and military, and (as they speak in the north) the heads of their clans. A convention of these might well be called an *assembly of all Israel*. These came together, on this occasion, 1. To do honour to Solomon, and to return him the thanks of the nation for all the good offices he had done in kindness to them. 2. To do honour to the ark, to pay respect to it, and testify their universal joy and satisfaction in its settlement. The advancement of the ark in external splendour, though it has often proved too strong a temptation to its hypocritical followers, yet, because it may prove an advantage to its true interests, is to be rejoiced in (with trembling) by all that

wish well to it. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments. Those that appeared before the Lord did not appear empty, for they all sacrificed sheep and oxen innumerable, v. 5. The people in Solomon's time were very rich, very easy, and very cheerful, and therefore it was fit that, on this occasion, they should consecrate not only their cheerfulness, but a part of their wealth, to God and his honour.

III. The priests do their part of the service. In the wilderness, the Levites were to carry the ark, because then there were not priests enough to do it; but here (it being the last time that the ark was to be carried) the priests themselves did it, as they were ordered to do when it surrounded Jericho. We are here told, 1. What was in the ark, nothing but the two tables of stone (v. 9), a treasure far exceeding all the dedicated things both of David and Solomon. The pot of manna and Aaron's rod were *by* the ark, but *not in* it. 2. What was brought up with the ark (v. 4): *The tabernacle of the congregation*. It is probable that both that which Moses set up in the wilderness, which was in Gibeon, and that which David pitched in Zion, were brought to the temple, to which they did, as it were, surrender all their holiness, merging it in that of the temple, which must henceforward be the place where God must be sought unto. Thus will all the church's holy things on earth, that are so much its joy and glory, be swallowed up in the perfection of holiness above. 3. Where it was fixed in its place, the place appointed for its rest after all its wanderings (r. 6): *In the oracle of the house*, whence they expected God to speak to them, even in the most holy place, which was made so by the presence of the ark, *under the wings of the great cherubim* which Solomon set up (ch. vi. 27), signifying the special protection of angels, under which God's ordinances and the assemblies of his people are taken. The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubim, to direct the high priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in, once a year, to sprinkle the blood there; so that still they continued of some use, though there was no longer occasion for them to carry it by.

IV. God graciously owns what is done and testifies his acceptance of it, v. 10, 11. The priests might come into the most holy place till God manifested his glory there; but, thenceforward, none might, at their peril, approach the ark, except the high priest, on the day of atonement. Therefore it was not till the priests had come out of the oracle that the *Shechinah* took possession of it, in a cloud, which filled not only the most holy place, but the temple, so that the priests who burnt incense at the golden altar could not bear it. By this visible emanation of the divine glory, 1. God put an honour upon the

ark, and owned it as a token of his presence. The glory of it had been long diminished and eclipsed by its frequent removes, the meanness of its lodging, and its being exposed too much to common view; but God will now show that it is as dear to him as ever, and he will have it looked upon with as much veneration as it was when Moses first brought it into his tabernacle. 2. He testified his acceptance of the building and furnishing of the temple as good service done to his name and his kingdom among men. 3. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and, by what they saw, confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses concerning the glory of God's appearances to their fathers, that hereby they might be kept close to the service of the God of Israel and fortified against temptations to idolatry. 4. He showed himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was now about to make; and not only so, but took up his residence in this house, that all his praying people might there be encouraged to make their applications to him. But the glory of God appeared in a cloud, a dark cloud, to signify, (1.) The darkness of that dispensation in comparison with the light of the gospel, by which, *with open face, we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord*. (2.) The darkness of our present state in comparison with the vision of God, which will be the happiness of heaven, where the divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what he is not, but then we shall see him as he is.

12 Thenspake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 13 I have surely built thee a house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever. 14 And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;) 15 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying, 16 Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. 17 And it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 18 And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. 19 Nevertheless



thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. 20 And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built a house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 21 And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Here, I. Solomon encourages the priests, who came out of the temple from their ministration, much astonished at the dark cloud that overshadowed them. The disciples of Christ *feared when they entered into the cloud*, though it was a *bright cloud* (Luke ix. 34), so did the priests when they found themselves wrapped in a thick cloud. To silence their fears, 1. He reminds them of that which they could not but know, that this was a token of God's presence (v. 12): *The Lord said he would dwell in the thick darkness*. It is so far from being a token of his displeasure that it is an indication of his favour; for he had said, *I will appear in a cloud*, Lev. xvi. 2. Note, Nothing is more effectual to reconcile us to dark dispensations than to consider what God hath said, and to compare his word and works together; as Lev. x. 3, *This is that which the Lord hath said*. God is light (1 John i. 5), and he dwells in light (1 Tim. vi. 16), but he dwells with men *in the thick darkness*, makes that his pavilion, because they could not hear the dazzling brightness of his glory. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself*. Thus our holy faith is exercised and our holy fear is increased. Where God dwells in light faith is swallowed up in vision and fear in love. 2. He himself bids it welcome, as worthy of all acceptance; and since God, by this cloud, came down to take possession, he does, in a few words, solemnly give him possession (v. 13): "*Surely I come*," says God. "*Amen*," says Solomon, "*Even so, come, Lord*. The house is thy own, entirely thy own, *I have surely built it for thee*, and furnished it for thee; it is for ever thy own, *a settled place for thee to abide in for ever*; it shall never be alienated nor converted to any other use; the ark shall never be removed from it, never unsettled again." It is Solomon's joy that God has taken possession; and it is his desire that he would keep possession. Let not the priests therefore dread that in which Solomon so much triumphs.

II. He instructs the people, and gives them a plain account concerning this house, which

they now saw God take possession of. He spoke briefly to the priests, to satisfy them (a word to the wise), but *turned his face about* (v. 14) from them *to the congregation* that stood in the outer court, and addressed himself to them largely.

1. He blessed them. When they saw the dark cloud enter the temple they blessed themselves, being astonished at it and afraid lest the thick darkness should be utter darkness to them. The amazing sight, such as they had never seen in their days, we may suppose, drove every man to his prayers, and the vainest minds were made serious by it. Solomon therefore set in with their prayers, and blessed them all, as one having authority (*for the less is blessed of the better*); in God's name, he spoke peace to them, and a blessing, like that with which the angel blessed Gideon when he was in a fright, upon a similar occasion. Judg. vi. 22, 23, *Peace be unto thee. Fear not; thou shalt not die*. Solomon *blessed them*, that is, he pacified them, and freed them from the consternation they were in. To receive this blessing, they all stood up, in token of reverence and readiness to hear and accept it. It is a proper posture to be in when the blessing is pronounced.

2. He informed them concerning this house which he had built and was now dedicating.

(1.) He began his account with a thankful acknowledgment of the good hand of his God upon him hitherto: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, v. 15. What we have the pleasure of God must have the praise of. He thus engaged the congregation to lift up their hearts in thanksgivings to God, which would help to still the tumult of spirit which, probably, they were in. "Come," says he, "let God's awful appearances not drive us from him, but draw us to him; *let us bless the Lord God of Israel*." Thus Job, under a dark scene, *blessed the name of the Lord*. Solomon here blessed God, [1.] For his promise which he *spoke with his mouth to David*. [2.] For the performance, that he had now *fulfilled it with his hand*. We have then the best sense of God's mercies, and most grateful both to ourselves and to our God, when we run up those streams to the fountain of the covenant, and compare what God does with what he has said.

(2.) Solomon is now making a solemn surrender or dedication of this house unto God, delivering it to God by his own act and deed. Grants and conveyances commonly begin with recitals of what has been before done, leading to what is now done: accordingly, here is a recital of the special causes and considerations moving Solomon to build this house. [1.] He recites the want of such a place. It was necessary that this should be premised; for, according to the dispensation they were under, there must be but one place in which they must expect God to record his name. If, therefore, there were

any other chosen, this would be a usurpation. But he shows, from what God himself had said, that there was no other (v. 16): *I chose no city to build a house in for my name; therefore there is occasion for the building of this.* [2.] He recites David's purpose to build such a place. God chose the person first that should rule his people (*I chose David, v. 16*) and then put it into *his heart to build a house for God's name, v. 17.* It was not a project of his own, for the magnifying of himself; but his good father, of blessed memory, laid the first design of it, though he lived not to lay the first stone. [3.] He recites God's promise concerning himself. God approved his father's purpose (v. 18): *Thou didst well, that it was in thy heart.* Note, Sincere intentions to do good shall be graciously approved and accepted of God, though Providence prevent our putting them in execution. *The desire of a man is his kindness.* See 2 Cor. viii. 12. God accepted David's good will, yet would not permit him to do the good work, but reserved the honour of it for his son (v. 19): *He shall build the house to my name;* so that what he had done was not of his own head, nor for his own glory, but the work itself was according to his father's design and his doing it was according to God's designation. [4.] He recites what he himself had done, and with what intention: *I have built a house, not for my own name, but for the name of the Lord God of Israel (v. 20), and set there a place for the ark, v. 21.* Thus all the right, title, interest, claim, and demand, whatsoever, which he or his had or might have in or to this house, or any of its appurtenances, he resigns, surrenders, and gives up, to God for ever. It is for his name, and his ark. In this, says he, *the Lord hath performed his word that he spoke.* Note, Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promises to him. The more we do for God the more we are indebted to him; for our sufficiency is of him, and not of ourselves.

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hand toward heaven: 23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, *there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keep-est covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:* 24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. 25 Therefore now, LORD God

of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me. 26 And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. 27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? 28 Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day: 29 That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, *even* toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. 30 And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive. 31 If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 32 Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. 33 When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: 34 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers. 35 When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against

thee: if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: 36 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance. 37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness *there be*; 38 What prayer and supplication soever be *made* by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: 39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, *even* thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) 40 That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. 41 Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; 42 (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; 43 Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as *do* thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name. 44 If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and *toward* the house that I have built for thy name: 45 Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. 46 If they sin

against thee, (for *there is* no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 *Yet* if they shall be-think themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; 48 And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: 49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause, 50 And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them: 51 For they *be* thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: 52 That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. 53 For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, *to be* thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.

Solomon having made a general surrender of this house to God, which God had signified his acceptance of by taking possession, next follows Solomon's prayer, in which he makes a more particular declaration of the uses of that surrender, with all humility and reverence, desiring that God would agree thereto. In short, it is his request that this temple may be deemed and taken, not only for a house of sacrifice (no mention is made of that in all this prayer, that was taken for

granted), but a *house of prayer for all people*; and herein it was a type of the gospel church; see Isa. lvi. 7, compared with Matt. xxi. 13. Therefore Solomon opened this house, not only with an extraordinary sacrifice, but with an extraordinary prayer.

I. The person that prayed this prayer was great. Solomon did not appoint one of the priests to do it, nor one of the prophets, but did it himself, *in the presence of all the congregation of Israel*, v. 22. 1. It was well that he was able to do it, a sign that he had made a good improvement of the pious education which his parents gave him. With all his learning, it seems, he learnt to pray well, and knew how to express himself to God in a suitable manner, *pro re nata*—on the spur of the occasion, without a prescribed form. In the crowd of his philosophical transactions, his proverbs, and songs, he did not forget his devotions. He was a gainer by prayer (*ch. iii. 11, &c.*), and, we may suppose, gave himself much to it, so that he excelled, as we find here, in praying gifts. 2. It was well that he was willing to do it, and not shy of performing divine service before so great a congregation. He was far from thinking it any disparagement to him to be his own chaplain and the mouth of the assembly to God; and shall any think themselves too great to do this office for their own families? Solomon, in all his other glory, even on his ivory throne, looked not so great as he did now. Great men should thus support the reputation of religious exercises and so honour God with their greatness. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, the great intercessor for all over whom he rules.

II. The posture in which he prayed was very reverent, and expressive of humility, seriousness, and fervency in prayer. He stood before the altar of the Lord, intimating that he expected the success of his prayer in virtue of that sacrifice which should be offered up in the fulness of time, typified by the sacrifices offered at that altar. But when he addressed himself to prayer, 1. He kneeled down, as appears, r. 54, where he is said to rise from his knees; compare 2 Chron. vi. 13. Kneeling is the most proper posture for prayer, Eph. iii. 14. The greatest of men must not think it below them to kneel before the Lord their Maker. Mr. Herbert says, "Kneeling never spoiled silk stockings." 2. He spread forth his hands towards heaven, and (as it should seem by v. 54) continued so to the end of the prayer, hereby expressing his desire towards, and expectations from, God, as a Father in heaven. He spread forth his hands, as it were to offer up the prayer from an open enlarged heart and to present it to heaven, and also to receive thence, with both arms, the mercy which he prayed for. Such outward expressions of the fixedness and fervour of devotion ought not to be despised or ridiculed.

III. The prayer itself was very long, and

perhaps much longer than is here recorded. At the throne of grace we have liberty of speech, and should use our liberty. It is not making long prayers, but making them for a pretence, that Christ condemns. In this excellent prayer Solomon does, as we should in every prayer,

1. Give glory to God. This he begins with, as the most proper act of adoration. He addresses himself to God as the Lord God of Israel, a God in covenant with them. And, (1.) He gives him the praise of what he is, in general, the best of beings in himself ("There is no God like thee, none of the powers in heaven or earth to be compared with thee"), and the best of masters to his people: "Who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants; not only as good as thy word in keeping covenant, but better than thy word in keeping mercy, doing that for them of which thou hast not given them an express promise, provided they walk before thee with all their heart, are zealous for thee, with an eye to thee." (2.) He gives him thanks for what he had done, in particular, for his family (v. 24): "Thou hast kept with thy servant David, as with thy other servants, that which thou promisedst him." The promise was a great favour to him, his support and joy, and now performance is the crown of it: "Thou hast fulfilled it, as it is this day. Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises call for enlarged praises.

2. He sues for grace and favour from God.

(1.) That God would perform to him and his the mercy which he had promised, v. 25, 26. Observe how this comes in. He thankfully acknowledges the performance of the promise in part; hitherto God had been faithful to his word: "Thou hast kept with thy servant David that which thou promisedst him, so far that his son fills his throne and has built the intended temple; therefore now keep with thy servant David that which thou hast further promised him, and which yet remains to be fulfilled in its season." Note, The experiences we have had of God's performing his promises should encourage us to depend upon them and plead them with God and those who expect further mercies must be thankful for former mercies. Hitherto God has helped, 2 Cor. i. 10. Solomon repeats the promise (c. 25): "There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne, not omitting the condition, so that thy children take heed to their way; for we cannot expect God's performance of the promise but upon our performance of the condition. And then he humbly begs this entail (v. 26): "Now, O God of Israel! let thy word be verified. God's promises (as we have often observed) must be both the guide of our desires and the ground of our hopes and expectations in prayer. David had prayed (2 Sam. vii. 25). "Lord, do as thou hast said. Note, Children should learn of their godly parents how to pray, and plead in prayer."

(2.) That God would have respect to this temple which he had now taken possession of, and that his eyes might be *continually open towards it* (v. 29), that he would graciously own it, and so put an honour upon it. To this purpose,

[1.] He premises, *First*, A humble admiration of God's gracious condescension (v. 27): "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Can we imagine that a Being infinitely high, and holy, and happy, will stoop so low as to let it be said of him that he dwells upon the earth and blesses the worms of the earth with his presence—the earth, that is corrupt, and overspread with sin—cursed, and reserved to fire? Lord, how is it?*" *Secondly*, A humble acknowledgment of the incapacity of the house he had built, though very capacious, to contain God: "*The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, for no place can include him who is present in all places; even this house is too little, too mean to be the residence of him that is infinite in being and glory.*" Note, When we have done the most we can for God we must acknowledge the infinite distance and disproportion between us and him, between our services and his perfections.

[2.] This premised, he prays in general, *First*, That God would graciously hear and answer the prayer he was now praying, v. 28. It was a humble prayer (*the prayer of thy servant*), an earnest prayer (such a prayer as is a cry), a prayer made in faith (*before thee, as the Lord, and my God*): "*Lord, hearken to it, have respect to it, not as the prayer of Israel's king (no man's dignity in the world, or titles of honour, will recommend him to God), but as the prayer of thy servant.*" *Secondly*, That God would in like manner hear and answer all the prayers that should, at any time hereafter, be made in or towards this house which he had now built, and of which God had said, *My name shall be there* (v. 29), his own prayers (*Hearken to the prayers which thy servant shall make*), and the prayers of all Israel, and of every particular Israelite (v. 30): "*Hear it in heaven, that is indeed thy dwelling-place, of which this is but a figure; and, when thou hearest, forgive the sin that separates between them and God, even the iniquity of their holy things.*"

*a.* He supposes that God's people will ever be a praying people; he resolves to adhere to that duty himself. *b.* He directs them to have an eye, in their prayers, to that place where God was pleased to manifest his glory as he did not any where else on earth. None but priests might come into that place; but, when they worshipped in the courts of the temple, it must be with an eye towards it, not as the object of their worship (that were idolatry), but as an instituted medium of their worship, helping the weakness of their faith, and typifying the mediation of Jesus Christ, who is the true temple, to whom we must have an eye in every thing wherein we

have to do with God. Those that were at a distance looked towards Jerusalem, for the sake of the temple, even when it was in ruins, Dan. vi. 10. *c.* He begs that God will *hear the prayers*, and *forgive the sins*, of all that look this way in their prayers. Not as if he thought all the devout prayers offered up to God by those who had no knowledge of this house, or regard to it, were therefore rejected; but he desired that the sensible tokens of the divine presence with which this house was blessed might always give sensible encouragement and comfort to believing petitioners.

[3.] More particularly, he here puts divers cases in which he supposed application would be made to God by prayer in or towards this house of prayer.

*First*, If God were appealed to by an oath for the determining of any controverted right between man and man, and the oath were taken before this altar, he prayed that God would, in some way or other, discover the truth, and judge between the contending parties, v. 31, 32. He prayed that, in difficult matters, this throne of grace might be a throne of judgment, from which God would right the injured that believingly appealed to it, and punish the injurious that presumptuously appealed to it. It was usual to swear by the temple and altar (Matt. xxiii. 16, 18), which corruption perhaps took its rise from this supposition of an oath taken, not *by* the temple or altar, but *at* or *near* them, for the greater solemnity.

*Secondly*, If the people of Israel were groaning under any national calamity, or any particular Israelite under any personal calamity, he desired that the prayers they should make in or towards this house might be heard and answered.

*a.* In case of public judgments, war (v. 33), want of rain (v. 35), famine, or pestilence (v. 37), and he ends with an *et cetera*—any plague or sickness; for no calamity befalls other people which may not befall God's Israel. Now he supposes, (*a.*) That the cause of the judgment would be sin, and nothing else. "*If they be smitten before the enemy, if there be no rain, it is because they have sinned against thee.*" It is sin that makes all the mischief. (*b.*) That the consequence of the judgment would be that they would cry to God, and make supplication to him in or towards that house. Those that slighted him before would solicit him then. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee. In their afflictions they will seek me early and earnestly.* (*c.*) That the condition of the removal of the judgment was something more than barely praying for it. He could not, he would not, ask that their prayer might be answered unless they did also *turn from their sin* (v. 35) and *turn again to God* (v. 33), that is, unless they did truly repent and reform. On no other terms may we look for salvation in this world or the other. But, if they did thus

qualify themselves for mercy, he prays. [a.] That God would hear from heaven, his holy temple above, to which they must look, through *this* temple. [b.] That he would forgive their sin; for then only are judgments removed in mercy when sin is pardoned. [c.] That he would *teach them the good way wherein they should walk*, by his Spirit, with his word and prophets; and thus they might be both profited by their trouble (for *blessed is the man whom God chastens and teaches*), and prepared for deliverance, which then comes in love when it finds us brought back to the good way of God and duty. [d.] That he would then remove the judgment, and redress the grievance, whatever it might be—not only accept the prayer, but give in the mercy prayed for.

b. In case of personal afflictions, v. 38—40. "If any man of Israel has an errand to thee, here let him find thee, here let him find favour with thee." He does not mention particulars, so numerous, so various, are the grievances of the children of men. (a.) He supposes that the complainants themselves would very sensibly feel their own burden, and would open that case to God which otherwise they kept to themselves and did not make any man acquainted with: *They shall know every man the plague of his own heart*, what it is that pains him, and (as we say) where the shoe pinches, and shall spread their hands, that is, spread their case, as Hezekiah spread the letter, in prayer, towards this house; whether the trouble be of body or mind, they shall represent it before God. Inward burdens seem especially meant. Sin is the plague of our own heart; our indwelling corruptions are our spiritual diseases. Every Israelite indeed endeavours to know these, that he may mortify them and watch against the risings of them. These he complains of. This is the burden he groans under: *O wretched man that I am!* These drive him to his knees, drive him to the sanctuary. Lamenting these, *he spreads forth his hands* in prayer. (b.) He refers all cases of this kind, that should be brought hither, to God. [a.] To his omniscience: *Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, not only the plagues of their hearts, their several wants and burdens" (these he knows, but he will know them from us), "but the desire and intent of the heart, the sincerity or hypocrisy of it. Thou knowest which prayer comes from the heart, and which from the lips only." The hearts of kings are not unsearchable to God. [b.] To his justice: *Give to every man according to his ways*; and he will not fail to do so, by the rules of grace, not the law, for then we should all be undone. [c.] To his mercy: *Hear, and forgive, and do* (v. 39), *that they may fear thee all their days*, v. 40. This use we should make of the mercy of God to us in hearing our prayers and forgiving our sins, we should thereby be engaged to fear

him while we live. *Fear the Lord and his goodness. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.*

c. The case of the stranger that is not an Israelite is next mentioned, a proselyte that comes to the temple to pray to the God of Israel, being convinced of the folly and wickedness of worshipping the gods of his country. (a.) He supposed that there would be many such (v. 41, 42), that the fame of God's great works which he had wrought for Israel, by which he proved himself to be above all gods, nay, to be God alone, would reach to distant countries: "Those that live remote *shall hear of thy strong hand, and thy stretched-out arm*; and this will bring all thinking considerate people to pray towards this house, that they may obtain the favour of a God that is able to do them a real kindness." (b.) He begged that God would accept and answer the proselyte's prayer (v. 43): *Do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for*. Thus early, thus ancient, were the indications of favour towards the *sinner of the Gentiles*: as there was then *one law for the native and for the stranger* (Exod. xii. 49), so there was one gospel for both. (c.) Herein he aimed at the glory of God and the propagating of the knowledge of him: "O let the stranger, in a special manner, speed well in his addresses, that he may carry away with him to his own country a good report of the God of Israel, *that all people may know thee and fear thee* (and, if they know thee aright, they will fear thee) *as do thy people Israel.*" So far was Solomon from monopolizing the knowledge and service of God, and wishing to have them confined to Israel only (which was the envious desire of the Jews in the days of Christ and his apostles), that he prayed that *all people might fear God as Israel did*. Would to God that all the children of men might receive the adoption, and be made God's children! *Father, thus glorify thy name.*

d. The case of an army going forth to battle is next recommended by Solomon to the divine favour. It is supposed that the army is encamped at a distance, somewhere a great way off, sent by divine order *against the enemy*, v. 44. "When they are ready to engage, and consider the perils and doubtful issues of battle, and put up a prayer to God for protection and success, with their eye *towards this city and temple*, then *hear their prayer*, encourage their hearts, strengthen their hands, cover their heads, and so maintain their cause and give them victory." Soldiers in the field must not think it enough that those who tarry at home pray for them, but must pray for themselves, and they are here encouraged to hope for a gracious answer. Praying should always go along with fighting.

e. The case of poor captives is the last that is here mentioned as a proper object of divine compassion. (a.) He supposes that

Israel will sin. He knew them, and himself, and the nature of man, too well to think this a foreign supposition; for *there is no man that sinneth not*, that does not enough to justify God in the severest rebukes of his providence, no man but what is in danger of falling into gross sin, and will if God leave him to himself. (b.) He supposes, what may well be expected, that, if Israel revolt from God, God will be *angry with them*, and *deliver them into the hand of their enemies*, to be carried captive into a strange country, v. 46. (c.) He then supposes that they will bethink themselves, will consider their ways (for afflictions put men upon consideration), and, when once they are brought to consider, they will repent and pray, will confess their sins, and humble themselves, saying, *We have sinned and have done perversely* (v. 47), and *in the land of their enemies will return to God*, whom they had forsaken in their own land. (d.) He supposes that in their prayers they will look towards their own land, the holy land, Jerusalem, the holy city, and the temple, the holy house, and directs them so to do (v. 48), for his sake who gave them that land, chose that city, and to whose honour that house was built. (e.) He prays that then God would *hear their prayers*, *forgive their sins*, *plead their cause*, and incline their enemies to *have compassion on them*, v. 49, 50. God has all hearts in his hand, and can, when he pleases, turn the strongest stream the contrary way, and make those to pity his people who have been their most cruel persecutors. See this prayer answered, Ps. cvi. 46. *He made them to be pitied of those that carried them captive*, which, if it did not release them, yet eased their captivity. (f.) He pleads their relation to God, and his interest in them: "They are thy people, whom thou hast taken into thy covenant and under thy care and conduct, thy inheritance, from which, more than from any other nation, thy rent and tribute of glory issue and arise (v. 51), *separated from among all people* to be so and by distinguishing favours appropriated to thee," v. 53.

*Lastly*, After all these particulars, he concludes with this general request, that God would hearken to all his praying people *in all that they call unto him for*, v. 52. No place now, under the gospel, can be imagined to add any acceptableness to the prayers made in or towards it, as the temple then did. That was a shadow: the substance is Christ; whatever we ask in his name, it shall be given us

54 And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. 55 And he stood, and

blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, 56 Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. 57 The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58 That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. 59 And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60 That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. 61 Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

Solomon, after his sermon in Ecclesiastes, gives us the conclusion of the whole matter; so he does here, after this long prayer; it is called his *blessing the people*, v. 55. He pronounced it standing, that he might be the better heard, and because he blessed as one having authority. Never were words more fitly spoken, nor more pertinently. Never was congregation dismissed with that which was more likely to affect them and abide with them.

1. He gives God the glory of the great and kind things he had done for Israel, v. 56. He stood up to *bless the congregation* (v. 55), but began with blessing God; for we must in *every thing give thanks*. Do we expect God should do well for us and ours? let us take all occasions to speak well of him and his. He blesses God who has given, he does not say wealth, and honour, and power, and victory, to Israel, but *rest*, as if that were a blessing more valuable than any of those. Let not those who have rest undervalue that blessing, though they want some others. He compares the blessings God had bestowed upon them with the promises he had given them, that God might have the honour of his faithfulness and the truth of that word of his which he has *magnified above all his name*. 1. He refers to the *promises given by the hand of Moses*, as he did

(v. 15, 24) to those which were made to David. There were promises given by Moses, as well as precepts. It was long ere God gave Israel the promised rest, but they had it at last, after many trials. The day will come when God's spiritual Israel will rest from all their labours. 2. He does, as it were, write a receipt in full on the back of these bonds: *There has not failed one word of all his good promises.* This discharge he gives in the name of all Israel, to the everlasting honour of the divine faithfulness, and the everlasting encouragement of all those that build upon the divine promises.

II. He blesses himself and the congregation, expressing his earnest desire and hope of these four things:—1. The presence of God with them, which is all in all to the happiness of a church and nation and of every particular person. This great congregation was now shortly to be scattered, and it was not likely that they would ever be all together again in this world. Solomon therefore dismisses them with this blessing: "*The Lord be present with us, and that will be comfort enough when we are absent from each other. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers (v. 57); let him not leave us, let him be to us to day, and to ours for ever, what he was to those that went before us.*" 2. The power of his grace upon them: "*Let him be with us, and continue with us, not that he may enlarge our coasts and increase our wealth, but that he may incline our hearts to himself, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments,*" v. 58. Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, with which we should covet earnestly to be blessed. Our hearts are naturally averse to our duty, and apt to decline from God; it is his grace that inclines them, grace that must be obtained by prayer. 3. An answer to the prayer he had now made: "*Let these my words be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, v. 59.* Let a gracious return be made to every prayer that shall be made here, and that will be a continual answer to this prayer." What Solomon asks here for his prayer is still granted in the intercession of Christ, of which his supplication was a type; that powerful prevailing intercession is before the Lord our God day and night, for our great Advocate attends continually to this very thing, and we may depend upon him to maintain our cause (against the adversary that accuses us day and night, Rev. xii. 10) and the common cause of his people Israel, at all times, upon all occasions, as the matter shall require, so as to speak for us the word of the day in its day, as the original here reads it, from which we shall receive grace sufficient, suitable, and seasonable, in every time of need. 4. The glorifying of God in the enlargement of his kingdom among men. Let Israel be thus blessed, thus favoured; not that all people may become tributaries

to us (Solomon sees his kingdom as great as he desires), but that all people may know that the Lord is God, and he only, and may come and worship him, v. 60. With this Solomon's prayers, like the prayers of his father David, the son of Jesse, are ended (Ps. lxxii. 19, 20): *Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.* We cannot close our prayers with a better summary than this, *Father, glorify thy name.*

III. He solemnly charges his people to continue and persevere in their duty to God. Having spoken to God for them, he here speaks from God to them, and those only would fare the better for his prayers that were made better by his preaching. His admonition, at parting, is, "*Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God, v. 61.* Let your obedience be universal, without dividing—upright, without dissembling—constant, without declining;" this is evangelical perfection.

62 And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. 63 And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD. 64 The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brasen altar that was before the LORD was too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. 65 And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days. 66 On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

We read before that Judah and Israel were eating and drinking, and very cheerful under their own vines and fig-trees; here we have them so in God's courts. Now they found Solomon's words true concerning Wisdom's ways, that they are ways of pleasantness.

I. They had abundant joy and satisfac-



tion while they attended at God's house, for there, 1. Solomon offered a great sacrifice, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, enough to have drained the country of cattle if it had not been a very fruitful land. The heathen thought themselves very generous when they offered sacrifices by *hundreds* (*hecatombs* they called them), but Solomon out-did them: he offered them by *thousands*. When Moses dedicated his altar, the peace-offerings were twenty-four *bullocks, and of rams, goats, and lambs*, 180 (Num. vii. 88); then the people were poor, but now that they had increased in wealth more was expected from them. Where God sows plentifully he must reap accordingly. All these sacrifices could not be offered in one day, but in the several days of the feast. Thirty oxen a day served Solomon's table, but thousands shall go to God's altar. Few are thus minded, to spend more on their souls than on their bodies. The flesh of the peace-offerings, which belonged to the offerer, it is likely, Solomon treated the people with. Christ fed those who attended him. The brazen altar was not large enough to receive all these sacrifices, so that, to serve the present occasion, they were forced to offer many of them *in the middle of the court*, (v. 64), some think on altars, altars of earth or stone, erected for the purpose and taken down when the solemnity was over, others think on the bare ground. Those that will be generous in serving God need not stint themselves for want of room and occasion to be so. 2. He kept a feast, the feast of tabernacles, as it should seem, after the feast of dedication, and both together lasted fourteen days (v. 65), yet they said not, *Behold, what a weuriness is this!*

II. They carried this joy and satisfaction with them to their own houses. When they were dismissed they blessed the king (v. 66), applauded him, admired him, and returned him the thanks of the congregation, and then *went to their tents joyful and glad of heart*, all easy and pleased. God's goodness was the matter of their joy, so it should be of ours at all times. They rejoiced in God's blessing both on the royal family and on the kingdom; thus should we go home rejoicing from holy ordinances, and go on our way rejoicing for God's goodness to our Lord Jesus (of whom David his servant was a type, in the advancement and establishment of his throne, pursuant to the covenant of redemption), and to all believers, his spiritual Israel, in their sanctification and consolation, pursuant to the covenant of grace. If we rejoice not herein always it is our own fault.

## CHAP. IX.

In this chapter we have, I. The answer which God, in a vision, gave to Solomon's prayer, and the terms he settled with him, ver. 1-9. II. The interchanging of grateful kindnesses between Solomon and Hiram, ver. 10-14. III. His workmen and buildings, ver. 15-21. IV. His devotion, ver. 25. V. His trading navy, ver. 26-28.

**A**ND it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of

the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do, 2 That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. 3 And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 4 And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: 5 Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. 6 But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: 7 Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people. 8 And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? 9 And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

God had given a real answer to Solomon's prayer, and tokens of his acceptance of it, immediately, by the *fire from heaven* which consumed the sacrifices (as we find 2 Chron. vii. 1); but here we have a more express and distinct answer to it. Observe,

I. In what way God gave him this answer. He appeared to him, as he had done at Gibeon,

in the beginning of his reign, in a dream or vision, v. 2. The comparing of it with that intimates that it was the very night after he had finished the solemnities of his festival, for so that was, 2 Chron. i. 6, 7. And then v. 1, speaking of Solomon's finishing all his buildings, which was not till many years after the dedication of the temple, must be read thus, *Solomon finished* (as it is 2 Chron. vii. 11), and v. 2 must be read, *and the Lord had appeared*.

II. The purport of this answer. 1. He assures him of his special presence in the temple he had built, in answer to the prayer he had made (v. 3): *I have hallowed this house*. Solomon had dedicated it, but it was God's prerogative to hallow it—to sanctify or consecrate it. Men cannot make a place holy, yet what we, in sincerity, devote to God, we may hope he will graciously accept as his; and *his eyes and his heart shall be upon it*. Apply it to persons, the living temples. Those whom God hallows or sanctifies, whom he sets apart for himself, have his eye, his heart, his love and care, and this perpetually. 2. He shows him that he and his people were for the future upon their good behaviour. Let them not be secure now, as if they might live as they please now that they have the *temple of the Lord* among them, Jer. vii. 4. No, this house was designed to protect them in their allegiance to God, but not in their rebellion or disobedience. God deals plainly with us, sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, and lets us know what we must trust to. God here tells Solomon, (1.) That the establishment of his kingdom depended upon the constancy of his obedience (v. 4, 5): "*If thou wilt walk before me as David did, who left thee a good example and encouragement enough to follow it (an advantage thou wilt be accountable for if thou do not improve it), if thou wilt walk as he did, in integrity of heart and uprightness*" (for that is the main matter—no religion without sincerity), "*then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom, and not otherwise*," for on that condition the promise was made, Ps. cxxxii. 12. If we perform our part of the covenant, God will not fail to perform his; if we improve the grace God has given us, he will confirm us to the end. Let not the children of godly parents expect the entail of the blessing, unless they tread in the steps of those that have gone before them to heaven, and keep up the virtue and piety of their ancestors. (2.) That the ruin of his kingdom would be the certain consequence of his or his children's apostasy from God (v. 6): "*But know thou, and let thy family and kingdom know it, and be admonished by it, that if you shall altogether turn from following me*" (so it is thought it should be read), "*if you forsake my service, desert my altar, and go and serve other gods*" (for that was the covenant-breaking sin), "*if you or your children break off from me, this house will*

not save you. But, [1.] Israel, though a holy nation, will be cut off (v. 7), by one judgment after another, till they become a proverb and a by-word, and the most despicable people under the sun, though now the most honourable." This supposes the destruction of the royal family, though it is not particularly threatened; the king is, of course, undone, if the kingdom be. [2.] "*The temple, though a holy house, which God himself has hallowed for his name, shall be abandoned and laid desolate* (v. 8, 9). *This house which is high*." They prided themselves in the stateliness and magnificence of the structure, but let them know that it is not so high as to be out of the reach of God's judgments, if they vilify it so as to exchange it for groves and idol-temples, and yet, at the same time, magnify it so as to think it will secure the favour of God to them though they ever so much corrupt themselves. *This house which is high*. Those that now pass by it are astonished at the bulk and beauty of it; the richness, contrivance, and workmanship, are admired by all spectators, and it is called a stupendous fabric; but, if you forsake God, its height will make its fall the more amazing, and those that pass by will be as much astonished at its ruins, while the guilty, self-convicted, self-condemned, Israelites, will be forced to acknowledge, with shame, that they themselves were the ruin of it; for when it shall be asked, *Why hath the Lord done thus to his house?* they cannot but answer, *It was because they forsook the Lord their God*. See Deut. xxix. 24, 25. Their sin will be read in their punishment. They deserted the temple, and therefore God deserted it; they profaned it with their sins and laid it common, and therefore God profaned it with his judgments and laid it waste. God gave Solomon fair warning of this, now that he had newly built and dedicated it, that he and his people might not be high-minded, but fear.

10 And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD, and the king's house, 11 (Now Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold, according to all his desire,) that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. 12 And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not. 13 And he said, What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day. 14 And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold.

What agreement was made between Solomon and Hiram, when the building-work was to be begun, we read before, *ch. v.* Here we have an account of their fair and friendly parting when the work was done. 1. Hiram made good his bargain to the utmost. He had furnished Solomon with materials for his buildings, according to all his desire (*v. 11*), and with gold, *v. 15*. So far was he from envying Solomon's growing greatness and reputation, and being jealous of him, that he helped to magnify him. Solomon's power, with Solomon's wisdom, needs not be dreaded by any of his neighbours. God honours him; therefore Hiram will. 2. Solomon, no doubt, made good his bargain, and gave Hiram *food for his household*, as was agreed, *ch. v. 9*. But here we are told that, over and above that, he gave him twenty cities (small ones we may suppose, like those mentioned here, *v. 19*) *in the land of Galilee*, *v. 11*. It should seem, these were not allotted to any of the tribes of Israel (for the border of Asher came up to them, *Josh. xix. 27*, which intimates that it did not include them), but continued in the hands of the natives till Solomon made himself master of them, and then made a present of them to Hiram. It becomes those that are great and good to be generous. Hiram came to see these cities, and did not like them (*v. 12*): *They pleased him not*. He called the country the land of *Cabul*, a Phenician word (says Josephus) which signifies *displeasing*, *v. 13*. He therefore returned them to Solomon (as we find, *2 Chron. viii. 2*), who repaired them, and then *caused the children of Israel to inhabit them*, which intimates that before they did not; but, when Solomon received back what he had given, no doubt he honourably gave Hiram an equivalent in something else. But what shall we think of this? Did Solomon act meanly in giving Hiram what was not worth his acceptance? Or was Hiram humourous and hard to please? I am willing to believe it was neither the one nor the other. The country was truly valuable, and so were the cities in it, but not agreeable to Hiram's genius. The Tyrians were merchants, trading men, that lived in fine houses, and became rich by navigation, but knew not how to value a country that was fit for corn and pasture (that was business that lay out of their way); and therefore Hiram desired Solomon to take them again, he knew not what to do with them, and, if he would please to gratify him, let it be in his own element, by becoming his partner in trade, as we find he did, *v. 27*. Hiram, who was used to the clean streets of Tyre, could by no means agree with the miry lanes in the land of Cabul, whereas the best lands have commonly the worst roads through them. See how the providence of God suits both the accommodation of this earth to the various dispositions of men and the dispositions of men to the various accommodations of the earth, and all for the good of mankind

in general. Some take delight in husbandry, and wonder what pleasure sailors can take on a rough sea; others take as much delight in navigation, and wonder what pleasure husbandmen can take in a dirty country, like the land of Cabul. It is so in many other instances, in which we may observe the wisdom of him whose all souls are and all lands.

15 And this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised; for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. 16 For Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it for a present unto his daughter, Solomon's wife. 17 And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether. 18 And Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, 19 And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. 20 And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, 21 Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice unto this day. 22 But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen: but they were men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen. 23 These were the chief of the officers that were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, which bare rule over the people that wrought in the work. 24 But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David unto her house which Solomon had built for her: then did he build Millo. 25 And three times in a year did Solomon offer burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar which he built unto the LORD, and he burnt incense upon the altar that was before the

LORD. So he finished the house. 26 And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. 26 And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. 28 And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.

We have here a further account of Solomon's greatness.

I. His buildings. He raised a great levy both of men and money, because he projected a great deal of building, which would both employ many hands and put him to a vast expense, v. 15. And he was a wise builder, who sat down first, and counted the cost, and would not begin to build till he found himself able to finish. Perhaps there was some complaint of the heaviness of the taxes, which the historian excuses from the greatness of his undertakings. He raised it, not for war (as other princes), which would spend the blood of his subjects, but for building, which would require only their labour and purses. Perhaps David observed Solomon's genius to lie towards building, and foresaw he would have his head and hands full of it, when he penned that song of degrees for Solomon, which begins, *Except the Lord build the house, those labour in vain that build it* (Ps. cxxvii. 1), directing him to acknowledge God in all his ways, and, by prayer and faith in his providence, to take him along with him in all his designs of this kind. And Solomon verily began his work at the right end, for he built God's house first, and finished that before he began his own; and then God blessed him, and he prospered in all his other buildings. If we begin with God, he will go on with us. Let the first-fruits be his, and the after-fruits will the more comfortably be ours, Matt. vi. 33. Solomon built a church first and then he was enabled to build houses, and cities, and walls. Those consult not their own interest that defer to the last what they design for pious uses. The further order in Solomon's buildings is observable. God's house first for religion, then his own for his own convenience, then a house for his wife, to which she removed as soon as it was ready for her (v. 24), then Millo, the town-house or guild-hall, then the wall of Jerusalem, the royal city, then some cities of note and strength in the country, which were decayed and unfortified, Hazor, Megiddo, &c. As he rebuilt these at his own charge, the inhabitants would be not only his subjects, but his tenants, which would increase the revenues of the crown for the benefit of his successors. Among the rest, he built Gezer, which Pha-

raoh took out of the hands of the Canaanites, and made a present of to his daughter, Solomon's wife, v. 16. See how God *maketh the earth to help the woman*. Solomon was not himself a warlike prince, but the king of Egypt, who was, took cities for him to build. Then he built cities for convenience, for store, for his chariots, and for his horsemen, v. 19. And, *lastly*, he built for pleasure in Lebanon, for his hunting perhaps, or other diversions there. Let piety begin, and profit proceed, and leave pleasure to the last.

II. His workmen and servants. In doing such great works, he must needs employ abundance of workmen. The honour of great men is borrowed from their inferiors, who do that which they have the credit of. 1. Solomon employed those who remained of the conquered and devoted nations in all the slavish work, v. 20, 21. We may suppose that they renounced their idolatry and submitted to Solomon's government, so that he could not, in honour, utterly destroy them, and they were so poor that he could not levy money on them; therefore he served himself of their labour. Herein he observed God's law (Lev. xxv. 44, *Thy bondmen shall be of the heathen*), and fulfilled Noah's curse upon Canaan, *A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren*, Gen. ix. 25. 2. He employed Israelites in the more creditable services (v. 22, 23): *Of them he made no bondmen*, for they were God's freemen, but he made them soldiers and courtiers, and gave them offices, as he saw them qualified, among his chariots and horsemen, appointing some to support the service of the inferior labourers. Thus he preserved the dignity and liberty of Israel and honoured their relation to God as a kingdom of priests.

III. His piety and devotion (v. 25): *Three times in a year* he offered burnt-offerings extraordinary (namely, at the three yearly feasts, the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles) in honour of the divine institution, besides what he offered at other times, both stately and upon special occasions. With his sacrifices he burnt incense, not himself (that was king Uzziah's crime), but the priest for him, at his charge, and for his particular use. It is said, *He offered on the altar which he himself built*. He took care to build it, and then, 1. He himself made use of it. Many will assist the devotions of others that neglect their own. Solomon did not think his building an altar would excuse him from sacrificing, but rather engage him the more to it. 2. He himself had the benefit and comfort of it. Whatever pains we take, for the support of religion, to the glory of God and the edification of others, we ourselves are likely to have the advantage of it.

IV. His merchandise. He built a fleet of trading ships at Ezion-geber (v. 26), a port on the coast of the Red Sea, the furthest stage of the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness, Num. xxxiii. 35. Probably that

wilderness now began to be peopled by the Edomites, which it was not then. To them this port had belonged, but, David having subdued the Edomites, it now pertained to the crown of Judah. The fleet traded to Ophir in the East Indies, supposed to be that which is now called *Ceylon*. Gold was the commodity traded for, substantial wealth. It should seem, Solomon had before been Hiram's partner, or put a venture into his ships, which made him a rich return of 120 talents (v. 14), which encouraged him to build a fleet of his own. The success of others in any employment should quicken our industry; for *in all labour there is profit*. Solomon sent his own servants as factors, and merchants, and super-cargoes, but hired Tyrians for sailors, for they had *knowledge of the sea*, v. 27. Thus one nation needs another, Providence so ordering it that there may be mutual commerce and assistance; for not only as Christians, but as men, we are members one of another. The fleet brought home to Solomon 420 talents of gold, v. 28. Canaan, the holy land, the glory of all lands, had no gold in it, which teaches us that that part of the wealth of this world which is for hoarding and trading is not the best part of it, but that which is more immediately for the present support and comfort of life, our own and others'; such were the productions of Canaan. Solomon got much by his merchandise, but, it should seem, David got much more by his conquests. What were Solomon's 420 talents to David's 100,000 talents of gold? 1 Chron. xxii. 14; xxix. 4. Solomon got much by his merchandise, and yet has directed us to a better trade, within reach of the poorest, having assured us from his own experience of both that the *merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than fine gold*, Prov. iii. 14.

## CHAP. X.

Still Solomon looks great, and every thing in this chapter adds to his magnificence. We read nothing indeed of his charity, of no hospitals he built, or alms-houses; he made his kingdom so rich that it did not need them; yet, no question, many poor were relieved from the abundance of his table. A church he had built, never to be equalled; schools or colleges he need not build any, his own palace is an academy, and his court a rendezvous of wise and learned men, as well as the centre of all the circulating riches of that part of the world. I. What abundance of wisdom there was there appears from the application the queen of Sheba made to him, and the great satisfaction she had in her entertainment there (ver. 1—13), and others likewise, ver. 24. II. What abundance of wealth there was there appears here by the gold imported, with other things, yearly (ver. 14, 15), and in a triennial return, ver. 22. Gold presented (ver. 25), and gold used in targets and shields (ver. 16, 17), and vessels, ver. 21. A stately throne made, ver. 18—20. His chariots and horsemen, ver. 26. His trade with Egypt, ver. 28, 29. And the great plenty of silver and cedars among his people, ver. 27. So that, putting all together, it must be owned, as it is here said (ver. 23), that "king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches, and for wisdom." Yet what was he to the King of kings? Where Christ is, by his word and spirit, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is there."

**A**ND when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. 2 And she came to Jeru-

salem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. 3 And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not *any* thing hid from the king, which he told her not. 4 And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, 5 And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. 6 And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. 7 Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen *it*: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. 8 Happy *are* thy men, happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, *and* that hear thy wisdom. 9 Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. 10 And she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. 11 And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones. 12 And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day. 13 And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside *that* which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and

went to her own country, she and her servants.

We have here an account of the visit which the queen of Sheba made to Solomon, no doubt when he was in the height of his piety and prosperity. Our Saviour calls her *the queen of the south*, for Sheba lay south of Canaan. The common opinion is that it was in Africa; and the Christians in Ethiopia, to this day, are confident that she came from their country, and that Candace was her successor, who is mentioned Acts viii. 27. But it is more probable that she came from the south part of Arabia the happy. It should seem she was a queen regent, sovereign of her country. Many a kingdom would have been deprived of its greatest blessings if a Salique law had been admitted into its constitution. Observe,

I. On what errand the queen of Sheba came—not to treat of trade or commerce, to adjust the limits of their dominions, to court his alliance for their mutual strength or his assistance against some common enemy, which are the common occasions of the congress of crowned heads and their interviews, but she came, 1. To satisfy her curiosity; for she had heard of his fame, especially for wisdom, and she came to prove him, whether he was so great a man as he was reported to be, v. 1. Solomon's fleet sailed near the coast of her country, and probably might put in there for fresh water; perhaps it was thus that she heard of the fame of Solomon, that he excelled in wisdom all the children of the east, and nothing would serve her but she would go herself and know the truth of the report. 2. To receive instruction from him. She came to *hear his wisdom*, and thereby to improve her own (Matt. xii. 42), that she might be the better able to govern her own kingdom by his maxims of policy. Those whom God has called to any public employment, particularly in the magistracy and ministry, should, by all means possible, be still improving themselves in that knowledge which will more and more qualify them for it, and enable them to discharge their trust well. But, it should seem, that which she chiefly aimed at was to be instructed in the things of God. She was religiously inclined, and had heard not only of the fame of Solomon, but concerning the name of the Lord (v. 1), the great name of that God whom Solomon worshipped and from whom he received his wisdom, and with this God she desired to be better acquainted. Therefore does our Saviour mention her enquiries after God, by Solomon, as an aggravation of the stupidity of those who enquire not after God by our Lord Jesus Christ, though he, having lain in his bosom, was much better able to instruct them.

II. With what equipage she came, with a very great retinue, agreeable to her rank, intending to try Solomon's wealth and ge-

nerosity, as well as his wisdom, what entertainment he could and would give to a royal visitant, v. 2. Yet she came not as one begging, but brought enough to bear her charges, and abundantly to recompense Solomon for his attention to her, nothing mean or common, but gold, and precious stones, and spices, because she came to trade for wisdom, which she would purchase at any rate.

III. What entertainment Solomon gave her. He despised not the weakness of her sex, blamed her not for leaving her own business at home to come so long a journey, and put herself and him to so much trouble and expense merely to satisfy her curiosity; but he made her welcome and all her train, gave her liberty to put all her questions, though some perhaps were frivolous, some captious, and some over-curious; he allowed her to *commune with him of all that was in her heart* (v. 2) and gave her a satisfactory answer to *all her questions* (v. 3), whether natural, moral, political, or divine. Were they designed to try him? he gave them such turns as abundantly satisfied her of his uncommon knowledge. Were they designed for her own instruction? (as we suppose most of them were), she received abundant instruction from him, and he made things surprisingly easy which she apprehended insuperably difficult, and satisfied her that there was a *divine sentence in the lips of this king*. But he informed her no doubt, with particular care, concerning God, and his law and instituted worship. He had taken it for granted (ch. viii. 42) that *strangers would hear of his great name*, and would come thither to enquire after him; and now that so great a stranger came we may be sure he was not wanting to assist and encourage her enquiries, and give her a description of the temple, and the officers and services of it, that she might be persuaded to serve the Lord whom she now sought.

IV. How she was affected with what she saw and heard in Solomon's court. Divers things are here mentioned which she admired, the buildings and furniture of his palace, the provision that was made every day for his table (when she saw that perhaps she wondered where there were mouths for all that meat, but when she saw the multitude of his attendants and guests she was as ready to wonder where was the meat for all those mouths), the orderly sitting of his servants, every one in his place, and the ready attendance of his ministers, without any confusion, their rich liveries, and the propriety with which his cup-bearers waited at his table. These things she admired, as adding much to his magnificence. But, above all these, the first thing mentioned (which contained all) is his wisdom (v. 4), of the transcendency of which she now had incontestable proofs: and the last thing mentioned, which crowned all, is his piety, the *ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord*,

with what gravity and seriousness, and an air of devotion in his countenance, he appeared, when he went to the temple to worship God, with as much humility then as majesty at other times. Many of the ancient versions read it, *The burnt-offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord*; she observed with what a generous bounty he brought his sacrifices, and with what a pious fervour he attended the offering of them; never did she see so much goodness with so much greatness. Every thing was so surprising that there was no more spirit in her, but she stood amazed; she had never seen the like.

V. How she expressed herself upon this occasion. 1. She owned her expectation far out-done, though it was highly raised by the report she heard, v. 6, 7. She is far from repenting her journey or calling herself a fool for undertaking it, but acknowledges it was well worth her while to come so far for the sight of that which she could not believe the report of. Usually things are represented to us, both by common fame and by our own imagination, much greater than we find them when we come to examine them; but here the truth exceeded both fame and fancy. Those who, through grace, are brought to experience the delights of communion with God will say that the one-half was not told them of the pleasures of Wisdom's ways and the advantages of her gates. Glorified saints, much more, will say that it was a true report which they heard of the happiness of heaven, but that the thousandth part was not told them, 1 Cor. ii. 9. 2. She pronounced those happy that constantly attended him, and waited on him at table: "*Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants* (v. 8); they may improve their own wisdom by hearing thine." She was tempted to envy them and to wish herself one of them. Note, It is a great advantage to be in good families, and to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise, and good, and communicative. Many have this happiness who know not how to value it. With much more reason may we say this of Christ's servants, *Blessed are those that dwell in his house, they will be still praising him*. 3. She blessed God, the giver of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the author of his advancement, who had made him king, (1.) In kindness to him, that he might have the larger opportunity of doing good with his wisdom: *He delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel*, v. 9. Solomon's preferment began in the prophet's calling him *Jedidiah, because the Lord loved him*, 2 Sam. xii. 25. It more than doubles our comforts if we have reason to hope they come from God's delight in us. *It was his pleasure concerning thee* (so it may be read) *to set thee on the throne*, not for thy merit's sake, but because it so seemed good unto him. (2.) In kindness to the people, *because the Lord loved Israel for ever*, designed

them a lasting bliss, long to survive him that laid the foundations of it. "He has made thee king, not that thou mayest live in pomp and pleasure, and do what thou wilt, but *to do judgment and justice*." This she kindly reminded Solomon of, and no doubt he took it kindly. Both magistrates and ministers must be more solicitous to do the duty of their places than to secure the honours and profits of them. To this she attributes his prosperity, not to his wisdom, for bread is not always *to the wise* (Eccl. ix. 11), but *whoso doeth judgment and justice, it shall be well with him*, Jer. xxii. 15. Thus *giving of thanks* must be *made for kings*, for good kings, for such kings; they are what God makes them to be.

VI. How they parted. 1. She made a noble present to Solomon of *gold and spices*, v. 10. David had foretold concerning Solomon that *to him should be given of the gold of Sheba*, Ps. lxxii. 15. The present of gold and spices which the wise men of the east brought to Christ was signified by this, Matt. ii. 11. Thus she paid for the wisdom she had learned and did not think she bought it dearly. Let those that are taught of God give him their hearts, and the present will be more acceptable than this of gold and spices. Mention is made of the great abundance Solomon had of his own, notwithstanding she presented and he accepted this gold. What we present to Christ he needs not, but will have us so to express our gratitude. The *almug-trees* are here spoken of (v. 11, 12) as extraordinary, because perhaps much admired by the queen of Sheba. 2. Solomon was not behind-hand with her: *He gave her whatsoever she asked*, patterns, we may suppose, of those things that were curious, by which she might make the like; or perhaps he gave her his precepts of wisdom and piety in writing, *besides that which he gave her of his royal bounty*, v. 13. Thus those who apply to our Lord Jesus will find him not only greater than Solomon, and wiser, but more kind; whatsoever we ask, it shall be done for us; nay, he will, out of his divine bounty, which infinitely exceeds royal bounty, even Solomon's, do for us *more than we are able to ask or think*.

14 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold, 15 *Beside that he had* of the merchantmen, and of the traffick of the spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country. 16 And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred *shekels* of gold went to one target. 17 And *he made* three hundred shields of beaten gold; three pound of gold went to

one shield; and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 18 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. 19 The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. 20 And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom. 21 And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. 22 For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. 23 So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. 24 And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25 And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. 26 And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem. 27 And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance. 28 And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. 29 And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty; and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means.

We have here a further account of Solomon's prosperity.

I. How he increased his wealth. Though he had much, he still coveted to have more, being willing to try the utmost the things of this world could do to make men happy. 1. Besides the gold that came from Ophir (ch ix. 28), he brought so much into his country from other places that the whole amounted, every year, to 666 talents (v. 14), an ominous number, compare Rev. xiii. 18, and Ezra ii. 13. 2. He received a great deal in customs from the merchants, and in land-taxes from the countries his father had conquered and made tributaries to Israel, v. 15. 3. He was Hiram's partner in a Tharshish fleet, of and for Tyre, which imported once in three years, not only gold, and silver, and ivory, substantial goods and serviceable, but apes to play with and peacocks to please the eye with their feathers, v. 22. I wish this may not be an evidence that Solomon and his people, being overcharged with prosperity, by this time grew childish and wanton. 4. He had presents made him, every year, from the neighbouring princes and great men, to engage the continuance of his friendship, not so much because they feared him or were jealous of him as because they loved him and admired his wisdom, had often occasion to consult him as an oracle, and sent him these presents by way of recompence for his advice in politics, and (whether it became his grandeur and generosity or no we will not enquire) he took all that came, even garments and spices, horses and mules, v. 24, 25. 5. He traded to Egypt for horses and linen-yarn (or, as some read it, *linen-cloth*), the staple commodities of that country, and had his own merchants or factors whom he employed in this traffic and who were accountable to him, v. 28, 29. The custom to be paid to the king of Egypt for exported chariots and horses out of Egypt was very high, but (as hishop Patriek understands it) Solomon, having married his daughter, got him to compound for the customs, so that he could bring them up cheaper than his neighbours, which obliged them to buy them of him, which he was wise enough no doubt to make his advantage of. This puts an honour upon the trading part of a nation, and sets a tradesman not so much below a gentleman as some place him, that Solomon, one of the greatest men that ever was, thought it no disparagement to him to deal in trade. In all labour there is profit.

II. What use he made of his wealth. He did not hoard it up in his coffers, that he might have it to look upon and leave behind him. He has, in his Ecclesiastes, so much exposed the folly of hoarding that we cannot suppose he would himself be guilty of it. No, God that had given him riches, and wealth, and honour, gave him also power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, Eccles. v. 19.

1. He laid out his gold in fine things for himself, which he might the better be allowed



to do when he had before laid out so much in fine things for the house of God. (1.) He made 200 targets, and 300 shields, of beaten gold (v. 16, 17), not for service, but for state, to be carried before him when he appeared in pomp. With us, magistrates have *swords* and *maces* carried before them, as the Romans had their *rods* and *axes*, in token of their power to correct and punish the bad, to whom they are to be a terror. But Solomon had *shields* and *targets* carried before him, to signify that he took more pleasure in using his power for the defence and protection of the good, to whom he would be a praise. Magistrates are *shields of the earth*. (2.) He made a stately throne, on which he sat, to give laws to his subjects, audience to ambassadors, and judgment upon appeals, v. 18—20. It was made of ivory, or elephants' teeth, which was very rich; and yet, as if he had so much gold that he knew not what to do with it, he *overlaid that with gold*, the best gold. Yet some think he did not cover the ivory all over, but here and there. He rolled it, flowered it, or inlaid it, with gold. The stays or arms of this stately chair were supported by the images of lions in gold; so were the steps and paces by which he went up to it, to be a memorandum to him of that courage and resolution wherewith he ought to execute judgment, not fearing the face of man. *The righteous*, in that post, *is bold as a lion*. (3.) He made all his drinking vessels, and all the furniture of his table, even at his country seat, of pure gold, v. 21. He did not grudge himself what he had, but took the credit and comfort of it, such as it was. That is good that does us good.

2. He made it circulate among his subjects, so that the kingdom was as rich as the king; for he had no separate interests of his own to consult, but sought the welfare of his people. Those princes are not governed by Solomon's maxims who think it policy to keep their subjects poor. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, who is not only rich himself, but enriches all that are his. Solomon was instrumental to bring so much gold into the country, and disperse it, that *silver was nothing accounted of*, v. 21. There was such plenty of it in Jerusalem that it was as the stones; and cedars, that used to be great rarities, were as common as *sycamore trees*, v. 27. Such is the nature of worldly wealth, plenty of it makes it the less valuable; much more should the enjoyment of spiritual riches lessen our esteem of all earthly possessions. If *gold in abundance* would make silver to seem so despicable, shall not wisdom, and grace, and the foretastes of heaven, which are far better than gold, make earthly wealth seem much more despicable?

Lastly, Well, thus rich, thus great, was Solomon, and thus did he *exceed all the kings of the earth*, v. 23. Now let us remember,

1 That this was he who, when he was *setting*

*out in the world*, did not ask for the wealth and honour of it, but asked for a *wise and understanding heart*. The more moderate our desires are towards earthly things the better qualified we are for the enjoyment of them and the more likely to have them. See, in Solomon's greatness, the performance of God's promise (ch. iii. 13), and let it encourage us to *seek first the righteousness of God's kingdom*. 2. That this was he who, having tasted all these enjoyments, wrote a whole book to show the vanity of all worldly things and the vexation of spirit that attends them, their insufficiency to make us happy and the folly of setting our hearts upon them, and to recommend to us the practice of serious godliness, as that which is the whole of man, and will do infinitely more towards the making of us easy and happy than all the wealth and power that he was master of, and which through the grace of God, is within our reach, when the thousandth part of Solomon's greatness is a thousand times more than we can ever be so vain as to promise ourselves in this world.

## CHAP. XI.

This chapter begins with as melancholy a "but" as almost any we find in all the Bible. *Hitherto we have read nothing of Solomon but what was great and good: but the lustre both of his goodness and of his greatness is here sullied and eclipsed, and his sun sets under a cloud*. 1. The glory of his piety is stained by his departure from God and his duty, in his latter days, marrying strange wives and worshipping strange gods, ver. 3—8. 11. The glory of his prosperity is stained by God's displeasure against him and the fruits of that displeasure. 1. He sent him an angry message, ver. 9—12. 2. He stirred up enemies, who gave him disturbance, Hadad (ver. 14—22), Rezon, ver. 23—25. 3. He gave away ten tribes of his twelve, from his posterity after him, to Jeroboam, whom therefore he sought in vain to slay (ver. 26—40), and this is all that remains here to be told concerning Solomon, except his death and burial (ver. 41—43), for there is nothing perfect under the sun, but all is so above the sun.

**B**UT king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; 2 Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and

went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father. 7 Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

This is a sad story, and very surprising, of Solomon's defection and degeneracy.

1. Let us enquire into the occasions and particulars of it. Shall Solomon fall, that was the beauty of Israel, and so great a blessing of his generation? Yes, it is too true, and the scripture is faithful in relating it, and repeating it, and referring to it long after, Neh. xiii. 26. *There was no king like Solomon who was beloved of his God, yet even him did outlandish women cause to sin.* There is the summary of his apostasy; it was the woman that deceived him, and was first in the transgression.

1. He doted on strange women, *many strange women.* Here his revolt began. (1.) He gave himself to women, which his mother had particularly cautioned him against. Prov. xxxi. 3, *Give not thy strength unto women* (perhaps alluding to Samson, who lost his strength by giving information of it to a woman), for it is that which, as much as any thing, destroys kings. His father David's fall began with the lusts of the flesh, which he should have taken warning by. The love of women has *cast down many wounded* (Prov. vii. 26) and *many* (says bishop Hall) *have had their head broken by their own rib.* (2.) He took many women, so many that, at last, they amounted to 700 wives and 300 concubines, 1000 in all, and not one good one among them, as he himself owns in his penitential sermon (Ecc. vii. 28), for no woman of established virtue would be one of such a set. God had, by his law, particularly forbidden the kings to multiply either horses or wives, Deut. xvii. 16, 17. How he broke the former law, in multiplying horses, and having them *out of Egypt* too (which was expressly prohibited in that law) we read *ch. x. 29*, and here we are told how he broke the latter (which proved of more fatal consequence) in multiplying wives. Note, Less sins, made bold with, open the door to greater. David had multiplied wives too much, and perhaps that made Solomon presume it lawful. Note, If those that are in reputation for religion in any thing set a bad example, they know not what a deal of mischief they may do by it, particularly to their own children. One bad act of a good man may be of more pernicious consequence to others than twenty of a wicked man. Probably Solomon, when he began to multiply

wives, intended not to exceed his father's number. But the way of sin is down-hill; those that have got into it cannot easily stop themselves. Divine wisdom has appointed one woman for one man, did so at first; and those who do not think one enough will not think two or three enough. Unbridled lust will be unbounded, and the loosened hind will wander endlessly. But this was not all: (3.) They were strange women, Moabites, Ammonites, &c., of the nations which God had particularly forbidden them to intermarry with, *v. 2.* Some think it was in policy that he married these foreigners, by them to get intelligence of the state of those countries. I rather fear it was because the daughters of Israel were too grave and modest for him, and those foreigners pleased him with the looseness and wantonness of their dress, and air, and conversation. Or, perhaps, it was looked upon as a piece of state to have his seraglio, as his other treasures, replenished with that which was far-fetched; as if that were too great an honour for the best of his subjects which would really have been a disgrace to the meanest of them—to be his mistresses. And, (4.) To complete the mischief, *Solomon clave unto these in love, v. 2.* He not only kept them, but was extravagantly fond of them, set his heart upon them, spent his time among them, thought every thing well they said and did, and despised Pharaoh's daughter, his rightful wife, who had been dear to him, and all the ladies of Israel, in comparison of them. Solomon was master of a great deal of knowledge, but to what purpose, when he had no better a government of his appetites?

2. He was drawn by them to the worship of strange gods, as Israel to Baal-peor by the daughters of Moab. This was the bad consequence of his multiplying wives. We have reason to think it impaired his health, and hastened upon him the decays of age; it exhausted his treasure, which, though vast indeed, would be found little enough to maintain the pride and vanity of all these women; perhaps it occasioned him, in his latter end, to neglect his business, by which he lost his supplies from abroad, and was forced, for the keeping up of his grandeur, to burden his subjects with those taxes which they complained of, *ch. xii. 4.* But none of these consequences were so bad as this: *His wives turned away his heart after other gods, v. 3, 4.* (1.) He grew cool and indifferent in his own religion and remiss in the service of the God of Israel: *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God (v. 4),* nor did he *follow him fully (v. 6),* like David. We cannot suppose that he quite cast off the worship of God, much less that he restrained or hindered it (the temple-service went on as usual); but he grew less frequent, and less serious, in his ascent to the house of the Lord and his attendance on his altar. He left his first love, lost his zeal for God, and did not persevere

to the end as he had begun; therefore it is said *he was not perfect*, because he was not constant; and he followed not God fully, because he turned from following him, and did not continue to the end. His father David had many faults, but he never neglected the worship of God, nor grew remiss in that, as Solomon did (his wives using all their arts to divert him from it), and *there* began his apostasy. (2.) He tolerated and maintained his wives in their idolatry and made no scruple of joining with them in it. Pharaoh's daughter was proselyted (as is supposed) to the Jews' religion, but, when he began to grow careless in the worship of God himself, he used no means to convert his other wives to it; in complaisance to them, he built chapels for their gods (v. 7, 8), maintained their priests, and occasionally did himself attend their altars, making a jest of it, asking, "What harm is there in it? Are not all religions alike?" which (says bishop Patrick) has been the *disease of some great wits*. When he humoured one thus, the rest would take it ill if he did not, in like manner, gratify them, so that he did it for all his wives (v. 8), and at last came to such a degree of impiety that he set up a high place for *Chemosh in the hill that is before Jerusalem, the mount of Olives*, as if to confront the temple which he himself had built. These high places continued here, not utterly demolished, till Josiah's time, 2 Kings xxiii. 13. This is the account here given of Solomon's apostasy.

11. Let us now pause awhile, and lament Solomon's fall; and we may justly stand and wonder at it. *How has the gold become dim! How has the most fine gold changed! Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and be horribly afraid*, as the prophet exclaims in a like case, Jer. ii. 12.

1. How strange, (1.) That Solomon, in his old age, should be ensnared with fleshly lusts, youthful lusts. As we must never presume upon the strength of our resolutions, so neither upon the weakness of our corruptions, so as to be secure and off our guard. (2.) That so wise a man as Solomon was, so famed for a quick understanding and sound judgment, should suffer himself to be made such a fool of by these foolish women. (3.) That one who had so often and so plainly warned others of the danger of the love of women should himself be so wretchedly bewitched with it; it is easier to see a mischief, and to show it to others, than to shun it ourselves. (4.) That so good a man, so zealous for the worship of God, who had been so conversant with divine things, and who prayed that excellent prayer at the dedication of the temple, should do these sinful things. Is this Solomon? Have all his wisdom and devotion come to this at last? Never was gallant ship so wrecked; never was crown so profaned.

2. What shall we say to all this? Why God permitted it it is not for us to enquire;

his way is in the sea and his path in the great waters; he knew how to bring glory to himself out of it. God foresaw it when he said concerning him that should build the temple, *If he commit iniquity, &c.*, 2 Sam. vii. 14. But it concerns us to enquire what good use we may make of it. (1.) Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. We see how weak we are of ourselves, without the grace of God: let us therefore live in a constant dependence on that grace. (2.) See the danger of a prosperous condition, and how hard it is to overcome the temptations of it. Solomon, like Jeshurun, waxed fat and then kicked. The food convenient, which Agur prayed for, is safer and better than the food abundant, which Solomon was even surfeited with. (3.) See what need those have to stand upon their guard who have made a great profession of religion, and shown themselves forward and zealous in devotion, because the devil will set upon them most violently, and, if they misbehave, the reproach is the greater. It is the evening that commends the day; let us therefore fear, lest, having run well, we seem to come short.

9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10 And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. 11 Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. 12 Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. 13 Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

Here is, I. God's anger against Solomon for his sin. The thing he did *displeased the Lord*. Time was when the Lord *loved Solomon* (2 Sam. xii. 24) and delighted in him (*ch. x. 9*), but now *the Lord was angry with Solomon* (v. 9), for there was in his sin, 1. The most base ingratitude that could be. He turned from the Lord *who had appeared unto him twice*, once before he began to build the temple (*ch. iii. 5*) and once after he had dedicated it, *ch. ix. 2*. God keeps account of the gracious visits he makes us, whether we do or no, knows how often he has

appeared to us and for us, and will remember it against us if we turn from him. God's appearing to Solomon was such a sensible confirmation of his faith as should have for ever prevented his worshipping any other god; it was also such a distinguishing favour, and put such an honour upon him, as he ought never to have forgotten, especially considering what God said to him in both these appearances. 2. The most wilful disobedience. This was the very thing concerning which God had commanded him—that he should not go after other gods, yet he was not restrained by such an express admonition, v. 10. Those who have dominion over men are apt to forget God's dominion over them; and, while they demand obedience from their inferiors, to deny it to him who is the Supreme.

11. The message he sent him hereupon (v. 11): *The Lord said unto Solomon* (it is likely by a prophet) that he must expect to smart for his apostasy. And here, 1. The sentence is just, that, since he had revolted from God, part of his kingdom should revolt from his family; he had given God's glory to the creature, and therefore God would give his crown to his servant: "*I will rend the kingdom from thee, in thy posterity, and will give it to thy servant, who shall bear rule over much of that for which thou hast laboured.*" This was a great mortification to Solomon, who pleased himself no doubt with the prospect of the entail of his rich kingdom upon his heirs for ever. Sin brings ruin upon families, cuts off entails, alienates estates, and lays men's honour in the dust. 2. Yet the mitigations of it are very kind, for David's sake (v. 12, 13), that is, for the sake of the promise made to David. Thus all the favour God shows to man is for *Christ's sake*, and for the sake of the covenant made with him. The kingdom shall be rent from Solomon's house, but, (1.) Not immediately. Solomon shall not live to see it done, but it shall be rent out of the hand of his son, a son that was born to him by one of his strange wives, for his mother was an Ammonitess (1 Kings xiv. 31) and probably had been a promoter of idolatry. What comfort can a man take in leaving children and an estate behind him if he do not leave a blessing behind him? Yet, if judgments be coming, it is a favour to us if they come not in our days, as 2 Kings xx. 19. (2.) Not wholly. One tribe, that of Judah, the strongest and most numerous, shall remain to the house of David (v. 13), for Jerusalem's sake, which David built, and for the sake of the temple there, which Solomon built; these shall not go into other hands. Solomon did not quickly nor wholly turn away from God; therefore God did not quickly nor wholly take the kingdom from him.

Upon this message which God graciously sent to Solomon, to awaken his conscience and bring him to repentance, we have reason to hope that he humbled himself before God,

confessed his sin, begged pardon, and returned to his duty, that he then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he bitterly laments his own folly and madness (ch. vii. 25, 26), and warns others to take heed of the like evil courses, and to *fear God and keep his commandments*, in consideration of the judgment to come, which, it is likely, had made him tremble, as it did Felix. That penitential sermon was as true an indication of a heart broken for sin and turned from it as David's penitential psalms were, though of another nature. God's grace in his people works variously. Thus, though Solomon fell, he was not utterly cast down; what God had said to David concerning him was fulfilled: *I will chasten him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him*, 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15. Though God may suffer those whom he loves to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. Solomon's defection, though it was much his reproach and a great blemish to his personal character, yet did not so far break in upon the character of his reign but that it was afterwards made the pattern of a good reign, 2 Chron. xi. 17, where the kings are said to have done well, while they walked in the way of David and Solomon. But, though we have all this reason to hope he repented and found mercy, yet the Holy Ghost did not think fit expressly to record his recovery, but left it doubtful, for warning to others not to sin upon presumption of repenting, for it is but a peradventure whether God will give them repentance, or, if he do, whether he will give the evidence of it to themselves or others. Great sinners may recover themselves and have the benefit of their repentance, and yet be denied both the comfort and credit of it; the guilt may be taken away, and yet not the reproach.

14 And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom. 15 For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom; 16 (For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom:) 17 That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad being yet a little child. 18 And they arose out of Midian, and came to Paran: and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt; which gave him a house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him

land. 19 And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him to wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. 20 And the sister of Tahpenes bare him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house: and Genubath was in Pharaoh's household among the sons of Pharaoh. 21 And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country. 22 Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country? And he answered, Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise. 23 And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah: 24 And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. 25 And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

While Solomon kept closely to God and to his duty there was *no adversary nor evil occurrent* (ch. v. 4), nothing to create him any disturbance or uneasiness in the least; but here we have an account of two adversaries that appeared against him, inconsiderable, and that could not have done any thing worth taking notice of if Solomon had not first made God his enemy. What hurt could Hadad or Rezon have done to so great and powerful a king as Solomon was if he had not, by sin, made himself mean and weak? And then those little people menace and insult him. If God be on our side, we need not fear the greatest adversary; but, if he be against us, he can make us fear the least, and the very grasshopper shall be a burden. Observe,

I. Both these adversaries God stirred up, v. 14, 23. Though they themselves were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, God made use of them to serve his design of correcting Solomon. The principal judgment threatened was deferred, namely, the rending of the kingdom from him, but he himself was made to feel the smart of the

rod, for his greater humiliation. Note, Whoever are, in any way, adversaries to us, we must take notice of the hand of God stirring them up to be so, as he bade Shimei curse David; we must look through the instruments of our trouble to the author of it and hear the Lord's controversy in it.

II. Both these adversaries had the origin of their enmity to Solomon and Israel laid in David's time, and in his conquests of their respective countries, v. 15, 24. Solomon had the benefit and advantage of his father's successes both in the enlargement of his dominion and the increase of his treasure, and would never have known any thing but the benefit of them if he had kept closely to God; but now he finds evils to balance the advantages, and that David had made himself enemies, who were thorns in his sides. Those that are too free in giving provocation ought to consider that perhaps it may be remembered in time to come and returned with interest to theirs after them; having so few friends in this world, it is our wisdom not to make ourselves more enemies than we needs must.

1. Hadad, an Edomite, was an adversary to Solomon. We are not told what he did against him, nor which way he gave him disturbance, only, in general, that he was an adversary to him: but we are told, (1.) What induced him to bear Solomon a grudge. David had conquered Edom, 2 Sam. viii. 14. Joab put all the males to the sword, v. 15, 16. A terrible execution he made, avenging on Edom their old enmity to Israel, yet perhaps with too great a severity. From this general slaughter, while Joab was burying the slain (for he left not any alive of their own people to bury them, and buried they must be, or they would be an annoyance to the country, Ezek. xxxix. 12), Hadad, a branch of the royal family, then a little child, was taken and preserved by some of the king's servants, and conveyed to Egypt, v. 17. They halted by the way, in Midian first, and then in Paran, where they furnished themselves with men, not to fight for them or force their passage, but to attend them, that their young master might go into Egypt with an equipage agreeable to his quality. There he was kindly sheltered and entertained by Pharaoh, as a distressed prince, was well provided for, and so recommended himself that, in process of time, he married the queen's sister (v. 19), and by her had a child, which the queen herself conceived such a kindness for that she brought him up in Pharaoh's house, among the king's children. (2.) What enabled him to do Solomon a mischief. Upon the death of David and Joab, he returned to his own country, in which, it should seem, he settled and remained quiet while Solomon continued wise and watchful for the public good, but from which he had opportunity of making inroads upon Israel when Solomon, having sinned away his wisdom

as Samson did his strength (and in the same way), grew careless of public affairs, was off his guard himself, and had forfeited the divine protection. What vexation Hadad gave to Solomon we are not here told, but only how loth Pharaoh was to part with him and how earnestly he solicited his stay (r. 22): *What hast thou lacked with me?* "Nothing," says Hadad; "but let me go to my own country, my native air, my native soil." Peter Martyr has a pious reflection upon this: "Heaven is our home, and we ought to keep up a holy affection to that, and desire towards it, even when the world, the place of our banishment, smiles most upon us. Does it ask, What have you lacked, that you are so willing to be gone? We may answer, "Nothing that the world can do for us; but still let us go thither, where our hope, and honour, and treasure are."

2. Rezon, a Syrian, was another adversary to Solomon. When David conquered the Syrians, he headed the remains, lived at large by spoil and rapine, till Solomon grew careless, and then he got possession of Damascus, reigned there (r. 24) and over the country about (r. 25), and he created troubles to Israel, probably in conjunction with Hadad, all the days of Solomon (namely, after his apostasy), or he was an enemy to Israel during all Solomon's reign, and upon all occasions vented his then impotent malice against them, but till Solomon's revolt, when his defence had departed from him, he could not do them any mischief. It is said of him that *he abhorred Israel*. Other princes loved and admired Israel and Solomon, and courted their friendship, but here was one that abhorred them. The greatest and best of princes and people, however much they may in general be respected, will yet perhaps be hated and abhorred by some.

26 And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up *his* hand against the king. 27 And this *was* the cause that he lifted up *his* hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, *and* repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. 28 And the man Jeroboam *was* a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. 29 And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had elad himself with a new garment; and they two *were* alone in

the field: 30 And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces: 31 And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: 32 (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) 33 Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in mine eyes, and to *keep* my statutes and my judgments, as *did* David his father. 34 Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, *even* ten tribes. 36 And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant *may* have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. 37 And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. 38 And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did: that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. 39 And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever. 40 Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

We have here the first mention of that in-

famous name *Jeroboam the son of Nebot, that made Israel to sin*; he is here brought upon the stage as an adversary to Solomon, whom God had expressly told (v. 11) that he would give the greatest part of his kingdom to his servant, and Jeroboam was the man. We have here an account,

I. Of his extraction, v. 26. He was of the tribe of Ephraim, the next in honour to Judah. His mother was a widow, to whom Providence had made up the loss of a husband in a son that was active and ingenious, and (we may suppose) a great support and comfort to her.

II. Of his elevation. It was Solomon's wisdom, when he had work to do, to employ proper persons in it. He observed Jeroboam to be a very industrious young man, one that minded his business, took a pleasure in it, and did it with all his might, and therefore he gradually advanced him, till at length he made him receiver-general for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, or perhaps put him into an office equivalent to that of lord-lieutenant of those two counties, for he was ruler of the burden, or tribute, that is, either of the taxes or of the militia of the house of Joseph. Note, Industry is the way to preferment. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business, that will take care and pains, and go through with it? he shall stand before kings, and not always be on the level with mean men.* Observe a difference between David, and both his predecessor and his successor: when Saul saw a *valiant man he took him to himself* (1 Sam. xiv. 52); when Solomon saw an *industrious man* he preferred him; but David's eyes were upon the *faithful in the land, that they might dwell with him*: if he saw a godly man, he preferred him, for he was a man after God's own heart, whose countenance beholds the upright.

III. Of his designation to the government of the ten tribes after the death of Solomon. Some think he was himself plotting against Solomon, and contriving to rise to the throne, that he was turbulent and aspiring. The Jews say that when he was employed by Solomon in building Millo he took opportunities of reflecting upon Solomon as oppressive to his people, and suggesting that which would alienate them from his government. It is not indeed probable that he should say much to that purport, for Solomon would have got notice of it, and it would have hindered his preferment; but it is plainly intimated that he had it in his thoughts, for the prophet tells him (v. 37), *Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth.* But this was the cause, or rather this was the story, of the lifting up of his hand against the king: Solomon made him ruler over the tribes of Joseph, and, as he was going to take possession of his government, he was told by a prophet in God's name that he should be king, which emboldened him to aim high, and in some instances

to oppose the king and give him vexation.

1. The prophet by whom this message was sent was *Ahijah of Shiloh*; we shall read of him again, ch. xiv. 2. It seems, Shiloh was not so perfectly forsaken and forgotten of God but that, in remembrance of the former days, it was blessed with a prophet. He delivered his message to Jeroboam in the way, his servants being probably ordered to retire, as in a like case (1 Sam. ix. 27), when Samuel delivered his message to Saul. God's word was not the less sacred and sure for being delivered to him thus obscurely, under a hedge it may be. 2. The sign by which it was represented to him was the rending of a garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten, v. 30, 31. It is not certain whether the garment was Jeroboam's, as is commonly taken for granted, or Ahijah's, which is more probable: *He* (that is, the prophet) *had clad himself with a new garment*, on purpose that he might with it give him a sign. The rending of the kingdom from Saul was signified by the rending of Samuel's mantle, not Saul's, 1 Sam. xv. 27, 28. And it was more significant to give Jeroboam ten pieces of that which was not his own before than of that which was. The prophets, both true and false, used such signs, even in the New Testament, as Agabus, Acts xxi. 10, 11. 3. The message itself, which is very particular. (1.) He assures him that he shall be king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, v. 31. The meanness of his extraction and employment shall be no hindrance to his advancement, when the God of Israel says (by whom kings reign), *I will give ten tribes unto thee.* (2.) He tells him the reason; not for his good character or deserts, but for the chastising of Solomon's apostasy: "Because he, and his family, and many of his people with him, *have forsaken me, and worshipped other gods,*" v. 33. It was because they had done ill, not because he was likely to do much better. Thus Israel must know that it is not *for their righteousness* that they are made masters of Canaan, but for the wickedness of the Canaanites, Deut. ix. 4. Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince. In telling him that the reason why he rent the kingdom from the house of Solomon was because they had forsaken God, he warns him to take heed of sinning away his preferment in like manner. (3.) He limits his expectations to the ten tribes only, and to them in reversion after the death of Solomon, lest he should aim at the whole and give immediate disturbance to Solomon's government. He is here told, [1.] That two tribes (called here *one tribe*, because little Benjamin was in a manner lost in the thousands of Judah) should remain sure to the house of David, and he must never make any attempt upon them: *He shall have one tribe* (v. 32), and again (v. 36), *That David may have a lamp*, that is, a shining name and memory (Ps

cxxxii. 17), and his family, as a royal family, may not be extinct. He must not think that David was rejected, as Saul was. No, God would not take his loving-kindness from him, as he did from Saul. The house of David must be supported and kept in reputation, for all this, because out of it the Messiah must arise. *Destroy it not, for that blessing is in it.* [2.] That Solomon must keep possession during his life, v. 34, 35. Jeroboam therefore must not offer to dethrone him, but wait with patience till his day shall come to fall. Solomon shall be prince, *all the days of his life*, not for his own sake (he had forfeited his crown to the justice of God), but for *David my servant's sake, because he kept my commandments*. Children that do not tread in their parents' steps yet often fare the better in this world for their good parents' piety. (4.) He gives him to understand that he will be upon his good behaviour. The grant of the crown must run *quamdiu se bene gesserit—during good behaviour*. "If thou wilt do what is right in my sight, I will build thee a sure house, and not otherwise" (v. 38), intimating that, if he forsook God, even his advancement to the throne would in time lay his family in the dust; whereas the seed of David, though afflicted, should not be afflicted for ever (v. 39), but should flourish again, as it did in many of the illustrious kings of Judah, who reigned in glory when Jeroboam's family was extirpated.

IV. Jeroboam's flight into Egypt, v. 40. In some way or other Solomon came to know of all this, probably from Jeroboam's own talk of it; he could not conceal it as Saul did, nor keep his own counsel; if he had, he might have staid in his country, and been preparing there for his future advancement; but letting it be known, 1. Solomon foolishly sought to kill his successor. Had not he taught others that, whatever devices are in men's hearts, *the counsel of the Lord shall stand?* And yet does he himself think to defeat that counsel? 2. Jeroboam prudently withdrew into Egypt. Though God's promise would have secured him any where, yet he would use means for his own preservation, and was content to live in exile and obscurity for a while, being sure of a kingdom at last. And shall not we be so, who have a better kingdom in reserve?

41 And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? 42 And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. 43 And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

We have here the conclusion of Solomon's story, and in it, 1. Reference is had to another history then extant, but (not being divinely inspired) since lost, *the Book of the Acts of Solomon*, v. 41. Probably this book was written by a chronologer or historiographer, whom Solomon employed to write his annals, out of which the sacred writer extracted what God saw fit to transmit to the church. 2. A summary of the years of his reign (v. 42): *He reigned in Jerusalem* (not, as his father, part of his time in Hebron and part in Jerusalem), *over all Israel* (not as his son, and his father in the beginning of his time, over Judah only), *forty years*. His reign was as long as his father's, but not his life. Sin shortened his days. 3. His death and burial, and his successor, v. 43. (1.) He followed his fathers to the grave, slept with them, and was buried in David's burying-place, with honour no doubt. (2.) His son followed him in the throne. Thus the graves are filling with the generations that go off, and houses are filling with those that are growing up. As the grave cries, "Give, give," so land is never lost for want of an heir.

## CHAP. XII.

The glory of the kingdom of Israel was in its height and perfection in Solomon; it was long in coming to it, but it soon declined, and began to sink and wither in the very next reign, as we find in this chapter, where we have the kingdom divided, and thereby weakened and made little in comparison with what it had been. Here is, I. Rehoboam's accession to the throne and Jeroboam's return out of Egypt, ver. 1, 2. II. The people's petition to Rehoboam for the redress of grievances, and the rough answer he gave, by the advice of his young counselors, to that petition, ver. 3—15. III. The revolt of the ten tribes thereupon, and their setting up Jeroboam, ver. 16—20. IV. Rehoboam's attempt to reduce them and the prohibition God gave to that attempt, ver. 21—24. V. Jeroboam's establishment of his government upon idolatry, ver. 25—35. Thus did Judah become weak, being deserted by their brethren, and Israel, by deserting the house of the Lord.

AND Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. 2 And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) 3 That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, 4 Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. 5 And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed. 6 And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye



advise that I may answer this people? 7 And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. 8 But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: 9 And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? 10 And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins. 11 And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. 13 And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; 14 And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 15 Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, yet we read but of one son he had to bear up his name, and he a fool. It is said (Hos. v. 10), *They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase.* Sin is a bad way of building up a family. Rehoboam was the son of the wisest of men, yet did not inherit his father's wisdom, and then it stood him in

little stead to inherit his father's throne. Neither wisdom nor grace runs in the blood. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man. Rehoboam came to the crown at forty years old, when men will be wise if ever they will, yet he was then foolish. Wisdom does not go by age, nor is it the multitude of years nor the advantage of education that reaches it. Solomon's court was a mart of wisdom and the rendezvous of learned men, and Rehoboam was the darling of the court; and yet all was not sufficient to make him a wise man. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* No dispute is made of Rehoboam's succession; upon the death of his father, he was immediately proclaimed. But,

I. The people desired a treaty with him at Shechem, and he condescended to meet them there. 1. Their pretence was to make him king, but the design was to unmake him. They would give him a public inauguration in another place than the city of David, that he might not seem to be king of Judah only. They had ten parts in him, and would have him among themselves for once, that they might recognize his title. 2. The place was ominous: at *Shechem*, where Abimelech set up himself (Judg. ix.); yet it had been famous for the convention of the states there, Josh. xxiv. 1. Rehoboam, we may suppose, knew of the threatening, that the kingdom should be rent from him, and hoped by going to Shechem, and treating there with the ten tribes, to prevent it: yet it proved the most impolitic thing he could do, and hastened the rupture.

II. The representatives of the tribes addressed him, praying to be eased of the taxes they were burdened with. The meeting being appointed, they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker. This they needed not to have done: he knew what God had designed him for, and would have come though he had not been sent for, for now was his time to expect the possession of the promised crown. In their address, 1. They complain of the last reign: *Thy father made our yoke grievous, v. 4.* They complain not of his father's idolatry and revolt from God; that which was the greatest grievance of all was none to them, so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, as if God or Moloch were all one, so they might but live at ease and pay no taxes. Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust. Never did people live more at ease than they did, nor in greater plenty. Did they pay taxes? It was to advance the strength and magnificence of their kingdom. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the Israelites. Were the taxes a burden? How could that be, when Solomon imported bullion in such plenty that silver was, in a man-

ner, as common as the stones? So that they did but render to Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Nay, suppose there was some hardship put upon them, were they not told before that this would be the manner of the king and yet they would have one? The best government cannot secure itself from reproach and censure, no, not Solomon's. Factious spirits will never want something to complain of. I know nothing in Solomon's administration that could make the people's yoke grievous, unless perhaps the women whom in his latter days he doted on were connived at in oppressing them. 2. They demand relief from him, and on this condition will continue in their allegiance to the house of David. They asked not to be wholly free from paying taxes, but to have the burden made lighter; this was all their care, to save their money, whether their religion was supported and the government protected or no. All seek their own.

III. Rehoboam consulted with those about him concerning the answer he should give to this address. It was prudent to take advice, especially having so weak a head of his own; yet, upon this occasion, it was impolitic to take time himself to consider, for thereby he gave time to the disaffected people to ripen things for a revolt, and his deliberating in so plain a case would be improved as an indication of the little concern he had for the people's case. They saw what they must expect, and prepared accordingly. Now, 1. The grave experienced men of his council advised him by all means to give the petitioners a kind answer, to give them good words, to promise them fair, and this day, this critical day, to serve them, that is, to tell them that he was their servant, and that he would redress all their grievances and make it his business to please them and make them easy. "Deny thyself (say they) so far as to do this for this once, and they will be *thy servants for ever*. When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts will reconcile and fix them to Solomon's family still." Note, The way to rule is to serve, to do good, and stoop to do it, to become all things to all men and so win their hearts. Those who are in power really sit highest, and easiest, and safest, when they take this method. 2. The young men of his council were hot and haughty, and they advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the people's demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness, (1.) That he did not prefer aged counsellors, but had a better opinion of the young men that had grown up with him and with whom he was familiar, *v. 8*. Days should speak. It was a folly for him to think that, because they had been his agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were therefore fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. Great wits have not always the most wisdom;

nor are those to be relied on as our best friends that know how to make us merry, for that will not make us happy. It is of great consequence to young people, that are setting out in the world, whom they associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those that feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and further them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin. (2.) That he did not prefer moderate counsels, but was pleased with those that put him upon harsh and rigorous methods, and advised him to double the taxes, whether there was occasion for so doing or no, and to tell them in plain terms that he would do so, *v. 10, 11*. These young counsellors thought the old men expressed themselves but dully, *v. 7*. They affect to be witty in their advice, and value themselves on that. The old men did not undertake to put words into Rehoboam's mouth, only counselled him to speak good words; but the young men will furnish him with very quaint and pretty phrases, with pointed and pert similitudes: *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins*, &c. That is not always the best sense that is best worded.

IV. He answered the people according to the counsel of the young men, *v. 14, 15*. He affected to be haughty and imperious, and fancied he could carry all before him with a high hand, and therefore would rather run the risk of losing them than deny himself so far as to give them good words. Note, Many ruin themselves by consulting their humour more than their interest. See,

1. How Rehoboam was infatuated in his counsels. He could not have acted more foolishly and impolitely. (1.) He owned their reflections upon his father's government to be true: *My father made your yoke heavy*; and therein he was unjust to his father's memory, which he might easily have vindicated from the imputation. (2.) He fancied himself better able to manage them, and impose upon them, than his father was, not considering that he was vastly inferior to him in capacity. Could he think to support the blemishes of his father's reign who could never pretend to come near the glories of it? (3.) He threatened not only to squeeze them by taxes, but to chastise them by cruel laws and severe executions of them, which should be not as whips only, but as scorpions, whips with rowels in them, that will fetch blood at every lash. In short, he would use them as brute beasts, load them and beat them at his pleasure: not caring whether they loved him or no, he would make them fear him. (4.) He gave this provocation to a people that by long ease and prosperity were made wealthy, and strong, and proud, and would not be trampled upon (as a poor cowed dispirited people may), to a people that were now disposed to revolt, and had one ready to head them. Never, surely, was man so

blinded by pride and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing is more fatal.

2. How God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was *from the Lord, v. 15.* He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and *hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace,* that the kingdom might be rent from him. Note, God serves his own wise and righteous purposes by the imprudences and iniquities of men, and snares sinners in the work of their own hands. Those that lose the kingdom of heaven throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by their own wilfulness and folly.

16 So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. 17 But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18 Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. 20 And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they set and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. 21 And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, a hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. 22 But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23 Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, 24 Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from

me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

We have here the rending of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the house of David, to effect which,

1. The people were bold and resolute in their revolt. They highly resented the provocation that Rehoboam had given them, were incensed at his menaces, concluded that that government would in the progress of it be intolerably grievous which in the beginning of it was so very haughty, and therefore immediately came to this resolve, one and all: *What portion have we in David? v. 16.* They speak here very unbecomingly of David, that great benefactor of their nation, calling him *the son of Jesse,* no greater a man than his neighbours. How soon are good men, and their good services to the public, forgotten! The rashness of their resolution was also much to be blamed. In time, and with prudent management, they might have settled the original contract with Rehoboam to mutual satisfaction. Had they enquired who gave Rehoboam this advice, and taken a course to remove those evil counsellors from about him, the rupture might have been prevented: otherwise their jealousy for their liberty and property well became that free people. *Israel is not a servant, is not a home-born slave; why should he be spoiled? Jer. ii. 14.* They are willing to be ruled, but not to be ridden. Protection draws allegiance, but destruction cannot. No marvel that *Israel falls away from the house of David (v. 19)* if the house of David fall away from the great ends of their advancement, which was to be *ministers of God to them for good.* But thus to rebel against the seed of David, whom God had advanced to the kingdom (entailing it on his seed), and to set up another king in opposition to that family, was a great sin; see 2 Chron. xiii. 5—8. To this God refers, Hos. viii. 4. *They have set up kings, but not by me.* And it is here mentioned to the praise of the tribe of Judah that they *followed the house of David (v. 17, 20),* and, for aught that appears, they found Rehoboam better than his word, nor did he rule with the rigour which at first he threatened.

II. Rehoboam was imprudent in the further management of this affair, and more and more infatuated. Having foolishly thrown himself into a quick-sand, he sunk the further in with plunging to get out. 1. He was very unadvised in sending Adoram, who was *over the tribute,* to treat with them v. 18. The tribute was the thing, and, for the sake of that, Adoram was the person, they most complained of. The very sight of him, whose name was odious among them, exasperated them, and made them outrageous. He was one to whom they could not so much as give a patient hearing, but *sounded*

him to death in a popular tumult. Rehoboam was now as unhappy in the choice of his ambassador as before of his counsellors. 2. Some think he was also unadvised in quitting his ground, and making so much haste to Jerusalem, for thereby he deserted his friends and gave advantage to his enemies, who had gone to their tents indeed (v. 16) in disgust, but did not offer to make Jeroboam king till Rehoboam had gone, v. 20. See how soon this foolish prince went from one extreme to the other. He hectorated and talked big when he thought all was his own, but sneaked and looked very mean when he saw himself in danger. It is common for those that are most haughty in their prosperity to be most abject in adversity.

III. God forbade his attempt to recover by the sword what he had lost. What was done was of God, who would not suffer that it should be undone again (as it would be if Rehoboam got the better and reduced the ten tribes), nor that more should be done to the prejudice of the house of David, as would be if Jeroboam got the better and conquered the two tribes. The thing must rest as it is, and therefore God forbids the battle. 1. It was brave in Rehoboam to design the reducing of the revolted by force. His courage came to him when he had come to Jerusalem, v. 21. There he thought himself among his firm friends, who generously adhered to him and appeared for him. Judah and Benjamin (who feared the Lord and the king, and meddled not with those that were given to change) presently raised an army of 180,000 men, for the recovery of their king's right to the ten tribes, and were resolved to stand by him (as we say) with their lives and fortunes, having either not such cause, or rather not such a disposition, to complain, as the rest had. 2. It was more brave in Rehoboam to desist when God, by a prophet, ordered him to lay down his arms. He would not lose a kingdom tamely, for then he would have been unworthy the title of a prince; and yet he would not contend for it in opposition to God, for then he would have been unworthy the title of an Israelite. To proceed in this war would be not only to fight against their brethren (v. 24), whom they ought to love, but to fight against their God, to whom they ought to submit: *This thing is from me.* These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses and troubles, that God is the author of them and our brethren are the instruments of them; let us not therefore meditate revenge. Rehoboam and his people hearkened to the word of the Lord, disbanded the army, and acquiesced. Though, in human probability, they had a fair prospect of success (for their army was numerous and resolute, Jeroboam's party weak and unsettled), though it would turn to their reproach among their neighbours to lose so much of their strength and never have one push for it, to make a flourish and do nothing,

yet, (1.) They regarded the command of God though sent by a poor prophet. When we know God's mind we must submit to it, how much soever it crosses our own mind. (2.) They consulted their own interest, concluding that though they had all the advantages, even that of right, on their side, yet they could not prosper if they fought in disobedience to God; and it was better to sit still than to rise up and fall. In the next reign God allowed them to fight, and gave them victory (2 Chron. xiii.), but not now.

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 27 If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah. 28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 29 And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. 31 And he made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. 32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. 33 So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam. He built Shechem first and then Penuel—beautified and fortified them, and

probably had a palace in each of them for himself (v. 25), the former in Ephraim, the latter in Gad, on the other side Jordan. This might be proper; but he formed another project for the establishing of his kingdom which was fatal to the interests of religion in it.

I. That which he designed was by some effectual means to secure those to himself who had now chosen him for their king, and to prevent their return to the house of David, v. 26, 27. It seems, 1. He was jealous of the people, afraid that, some time or other, they would kill him and go again to Rehoboam. Many that have been advanced in one tumult have been hurled down in another. Jeroboam could not put any confidence in the affections of his people, though now they seemed extremely fond of him; for what is got by wrong and usurpation cannot be enjoyed nor kept with any security or satisfaction. 2. He was distrustful of the promise of God, could not take his word that, if he would keep close to his duty, *God would build him a sure house* (ch. xi. 38); but he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

II. The way he took to do this was by keeping the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. That was the place God had chosen, to put his name there. Solomon's temple was there, which God had, in the sight of all Israel, and in the memory of many now living, taken solemn possession of in a cloud of glory. At the altar there the priest of the Lord attended, there all Israel were to keep the feasts, and thither they were to bring their sacrifices. Now,

1. Jeroboam apprehended that, if the people continued to do this, they would in time return to the house of David, allured by the magnificence both of the court and of the temple. If they cleave to their old religion, they will go back to their old king. We may suppose, if he had treated with Rehoboam for the safe conduct of himself and his people to and from Jerusalem at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, it would not have been denied him; therefore he fears not their being driven back by force, but their going back voluntarily to Rehoboam.

2. He therefore dissuaded them from going up to Jerusalem, pretending to consult their ease: "*It is too much for you to go so far to worship God, v. 28. It is a heavy yoke, and it is time to shake it off; you have gone long enough to Jerusalem*" (so some read it); "the temple, now that you are used to it, does not appear so glorious and sacred as it did at first" (sensible glories wither by degrees in men's estimation); "you have freed yourselves from other burdens, free yourselves from this: why should we now be tied to one place any more than in Samuel's time?"

3. He provided for the assistance of their devotion at home. Upon consultation with some of his politicians, he came to this resolve, to set up two golden calves, as tokens or signs of the divine presence, and persuade the people that they might as well stay at home and offer sacrifice to those as go to Jerusalem to worship before the ark: and some are so charitable as to think they were made to represent the mercy-seat and the cherubim over the ark; but more probably he adopted the idolatry of the Egyptians, in whose land he had sojourned for some time and who worshipped their god Apis under the similitude of a bull or calf. (1.) He would not be at the charge of building a golden temple, as Solomon had done; two golden calves are the most that he can afford. (2.) He intended, no doubt, by these to represent, or rather make present, not any false god, as Moloch or Chemosh, but the true God only, the God of Israel, the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, as he declares, v. 28. So that it was no violation of the first commandment, but the second. And he chose thus to engage the people's devotion because he knew there were many among them so in love with images that for the sake of the calves they would willingly quit God's temple, where all images were forbidden. (3.) He set up two, by degrees to break people off from the belief of the unity of the godhead, which would pave the way to the polytheism of the Pagans. He set up these two at Dan and Beth-el (one the utmost border of his country northward, the other southward, as if they were the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. Beth-el lay close to Judah. He set up one there, to tempt those of Rehoboam's subjects over to him who were inclined to image-worship, in lieu of those of his subjects that would continue to go to Jerusalem. He set up the other at Dan, for the convenience of those that lay most remote, and because Micah's images had been set up there, and great veneration paid to them for many ages, Judg. xviii. 30, 31. *Beth-el* signifies *the house of God*, which gave some colour to the superstition; but the prophet called it *Beth-aven, the house of vanity, or iniquity*.

4. The people complied with him herein, and were fond enough of the novelty: *They went to worship before the one, even unto Dan* (v. 30), to that at Dan first because it was first set up, or *even* to that at Dan, though it lay such a great way off. Those that thought it much to go to Jerusalem, to worship God according to his institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far, to Dan, to worship him according to their own inventions. Or they are said to go to one of the calves at Dan because Abijah, king of Judah, within twenty years, recovered Beth-el (2 Chron. xiii. 19), and it is likely removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then they had only that at Dan to go to. *This became a sin;*

and a great sin it was, against the express letter of the second commandment. God had sometimes dispensed with the law concerning worshipping in one place, but never allowed the worship of him by images. Hereby they justified their fathers in making the calf at Horeb, though God had so fully shown his displeasure against them for it and threatened to visit for it in the day of visitation (Exod. xxxii. 34), so that it was as great a contempt of God's wrath as it was of his law; and thus they added sin to sin. Bishop Patrick quotes a saying of the Jews, That till Jeroboam's time the Israelites sucked but one calf, but from that time they sucked two.

5. Having set up the gods, he fitted up accommodations for them; and wherein he varied from the divine appointment we are here told, which intimates that in other things he imitated what was done in Judah (v. 32) as well as he could. See how one error multiplied into many. (1.) He made a house of high-places, or of altars, one temple at Dan, we may suppose, and another at Beth-el (v. 31), and in each many altars, probably complaining of it as an inconvenience that in the temple at Jerusalem there was but one. The multiplying of altars passed with some for a piece of devotion, but God, by the prophet, puts another construction upon it, Hos. viii. 11. *Ephraim has made many altars to sin.* (2.) He made priests of the lowest of the people; and the lowest of the people were good enough to be priests to his calves, and too good. He made priests from the extremest parts of the people, that is, some out of every corner of the country, whom he ordered to reside among their neighbours, to instruct them in his appointments and reconcile them to them. Thus were they dispersed as the Levites, but were not of the sons of Levi. But the priests of the high-places, or altars, he ordered to reside in Beth-el, as the priests at Jerusalem (v. 32), to attend the public service. (3.) The feast of tabernacles, which God had appointed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he adjourned to the fifteenth day of the eighth month (v. 32), *the month which he devised of his own heart*, to show his power in ecclesiastical matters, v. 33. The passover and pentecost he observed in their proper season, or did not observe them at all, or with little solemnity in comparison with this. (4.) He himself assuming a power to make priests, no marvel if he undertook to do the priests' work with his own hands: *He offered upon the altar.* This is twice mentioned (v. 32, 33), as also that he burnt incense. This was connived at in him because it was of a piece with the rest of his irregularities; but in king Uzziah it was immediately punished with the plague of leprosy. He did it himself, to make himself look great among the people and to get the reputation of a devout man, also to grace the solemnity of his new festival, with which, it is likely, at this time he joined the feast of the dedication of his

altar. And thus, [1.] Jeroboam sinned himself, yet perhaps excused himself to the world and his own conscience with this, that he did not do so ill as Solomon did, who worshipped other gods. [2.] He made Israel to sin, drew them off from the worship of God and entailed idolatry upon their seed. And hereby they were punished for deserting the thrones of the house of David. The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, for the adjusting of the annals of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, supposes that Jeroboam changed the calculation of the year and made it to contain but eleven months, and that by those years the reigns of the kings of Israel are measured till Jehu's revolution and no longer, so that during this interval eleven years of the annals of Judah answer to twelve in those of Israel.

#### CHAP. XIII.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Jeroboam attending his altar at Beth-el, and there we find him in the beginning of this, when he received a testimony from God against his idolatry and apostasy. This was sent to him by a prophet, a man of God that lived in Judah, who is the principal subject of the story of this chapter, where we are told, I. What passed between him and the new king. 1. The prophet threatened Jeroboam's altar (ver. 1, 2), and gave him a sign (ver. 3), which immediately came to pass, ver. 5. 2. The king threatened the prophet, and was himself made another sign, by the withering of his hand (ver. 4), and the restoring of it upon his submission and the prophet's intercession, ver. 6. 3. The prophet refused the kindness offered him thereupon, ver. 7-10. II. What passed between him and the old prophet. 1. The old prophet fetched him back by a lie, and gave him entertainment, ver. 11-13. 2. He, for accepting it, in disobedience to the divine command, is threatened with death, ver. 20-22. And, 3. The threatening is executed, for he is slain by a lion (ver. 23, 24), and buried at Beth-el, ver. 25-32. 4. Jeroboam is hardened in his idolatry, ver. 33, 34. "Thy judgments, Lord, are a great deep."

AND, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. 3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 4 And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. 5 The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, ac-

according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6 And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as *it was* before. 7 And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. 8 And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: 9 For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. 10 So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Beth-el.

Here is, I. A messenger sent to Jeroboam, to signify to him God's displeasure against his idolatry, *v. 1.* The army of Judah that aimed to ruin him was countermanded, and might not draw a sword against him (*ch. xii. 24*); but a prophet of Judah is, instead thereof, sent to reclaim him from his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin; for God delights not in the death of sinners, but would rather they would turn and live. How bold was the messenger that durst attack the king in his pride and interrupt the solemnity he was proud of! Those that go on God's errand must not fear the face of man; they know who will bear them out. How kind was he that sent him to warn Jeroboam of the wrath of God *revealed from heaven* against his *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*!

II. The message delivered in God's name, not whispered, but cried with a loud voice, denoting both the prophet's courage, that he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it, and his earnestness, that he desired to be heard and heeded by all that were present, who were not a few, on this great occasion. It was directed, not to Jeroboam nor to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which would sooner hear and yield than those who were mad upon their idols and deaf to divine calls. Yet, in threatening the altar, God threatened the founder and worshippers, to whom it was as dear as their own souls, and who might conclude, "If God's wrath fasten upon the lifeless guiltless altar, how shall we

escape?" That which was foretold concerning the altar (*v. 2*) was that, in process of time, a prince of the house of David, Josiah by name, should pollute this altar by sacrificing the idolatrous priests themselves upon it, and burning the bones of dead men. Let Jeroboam know and be sure, 1. That the altar he now consecrated should be desecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure for ever. 2. That the *priests of the high places* he now made should themselves be made sacrifices to the justice of God, and the first and only sacrifices upon this altar that would be pleasing to him. If the offering be such as is an abomination to God, it will follow, of course, that the offerers must themselves fall under his wrath, which will abide upon them, since it is not otherwise transmitted. 3. That this should be done by a branch of the *house of David*. That family which he and his kingdom had despised and treacherously deserted should recover so much power as to demolish that altar which he thought to establish; so that right and truth should at length prevail, both in civil and sacred matters, notwithstanding the present triumphs of those that were given to change the fear both of *God and the king*. It was about 356 years ere this prediction was fulfilled, yet it was spoken of as sure and nigh at hand, for a thousand years with God are but as one day. Nothing more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet Josiah was here named above 300 years before he was born. Nothing future is hidden from God. There are *names in the book* of the divine prescience (*Phil. iv. 3*), names *written in heaven*.

III. A sign is given for the confirming of the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invisible power and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered (*v. 3*), which came to pass immediately, *v. 5*. This was, 1. A proof that the prophet was sent of God, *who confirmed the word with this sign following*, *Mark xvi. 20*. 2. A present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. How could the gift be acceptable when the altar that should sanctify it was an abomination? 3. It was a reproach to the people, whose hearts were harder than these stones and rent not under the word of the Lord. 4. It was a specimen of what should be done to it in the accomplishment of this prophecy by Josiah; it was now rent, in token of its being then ruined.

IV. Jeroboam's hand withered, which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, *v. 4*. Instead of trembling at the message, as he might well have done, he assaulted him that brought it, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned and contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. *Rebuke a sinner and he will hate thee*, and do thee a mischief if he can; yet God's prophets

must rather expose themselves than betray their trust: he that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man, as he did Jeroboam's here by withering his hand, so that he could neither hurt the prophet nor draw it in to help himself. When his hand was stretched out to burn incense to his calves it was not withered; but, when it is stretched out against a prophet, he shall have no use of it till he humble himself. Of all the wickedness of the wicked there is none more provoking to God than their malicious attempts against his prophets, of whom he has said, *Touch them not, do them no harm*. As this was a punishment of Jeroboam, and answering to the sin, so it was the deliverance of the prophet. God has many ways of disabling the enemies of his church from executing their mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God, in justice, harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this, and much more dreadful.

V. The sudden healing of the hand that was suddenly dried up, upon his submission, c. 6. That word of God which should have touched his conscience humbled him not, but this which *touched his bone and his flesh* brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now, 1. Not from his calves, but from God only, from his power and his favour. He wounded, and no hand but his can make whole. 2. Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet, whom he had just now threatened and aimed to destroy. The time may come when those that hate the preaching would be glad of the prayers of faithful ministers. "Pray to the Lord thy God," says Jeroboam; "thou hast an interest in him; improve it for me." But observe, He did not desire the prophet to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, only that *his hand might be restored*; thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would *take away this death only* (Exod. x. 17), not this *sin*. The prophet, as became a man of God, renders good for evil, upbraids not Jeroboam with his impotent malice, nor triumphs in his submission, but immediately addresses himself to God for him. Those only are entitled to the blessing Christ pronounced on the persecuted that learn of him to pray for their persecutors, Matt. v. 10, 44. When the prophet thus honoured God, by showing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this further honour upon him, that at his word he recalled the judgment and by another miracle healed the withered hand, that by the goodness of God Jeroboam might be led to repentance, and, if he were not broken by the judgment, yet might be melted by the mercy. With both he

seemed affected for the present, but the impressions wore off.

VI. The prophet's refusal of Jeroboam's kind invitation, in which observe, 1. That God forbade his messenger to eat or drink in Beth-el (c. 9), to show his detestation of their execrable idolatry and apostasy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, lest we have infection from them or give encouragement to them. He must not *turn back the same way*, but deliver his message, as it were, *in transitu—as he passes along*. He shall not seem to be sent on purpose (they were unworthy such a favour), but as if he only called by the way, his spirit being stirred, like Paul's at Athens, as he *passed and saw their devotions*. God would, by this command, try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be *rebellious, like that rebellious house*, Ezek. ii. 8. 2. That Jeroboam was so affected with the cure of his hand that though we read not of his thanksgivings to God for the mercy, or of his sending an offering to the altar at Jerusalem in acknowledgment of it, yet he was willing to express his gratitude to the prophet and pay him for his prayers, c. 7. Favours to the body will make even graceless men seem grateful to good ministers. 3. That the prophet, though hungry and weary, and perhaps poor, in obedience to the divine command refused both the entertainment and the reward proffered him. He might have supposed his acceptance of it would give him an opportunity of discoursing further with the king, in order to his effectual reformation, now that he was convinced; yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but, like a faithful careful messenger, hastens home when he has done his errand. Those have little learned the lessons of self-denial that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

11 Now there dwelt an old prophet in Beth-el; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Beth-el: the words which he had spoken unto the king, then they told also to their father. 12 And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. 13 And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode thereon, 14 And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. 15 Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread.



16 And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: 17 For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. 18 He said unto him, I *am* a prophet also as thou *art*; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. *But* he lied unto him. 19 So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. 20 And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: 21 And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, 22 But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drank water in the place of the which *the LORD* did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

The man of God had honestly and resolutely refused the king's invitation, though he promised him a reward; yet he was over-persuaded by an old prophet to come back with him, and dine in Beth-el, contrary to the command given him. Here we find how dearly his dinner cost him. Observe with wonder,

I. The old prophet's wickedness. I cannot but call him a false prophet and a bad man, it being much easier to believe that from one of such a bad character should be extorted a confirmation of what the man of God said (as we find, v. 32) than that a true prophet, and a good man, should tell such a deliberate lie as he did, and father it upon God. *A good tree could never bring forth such corrupt fruit.* Perhaps he was trained up among the sons of the prophets, in one of Samuel's colleges not far off, whence he retained the name of a prophet, but, growing worldly and profane, the spirit of prophecy had departed from him. If he had been a good prophet he would have reprov'd Jeroboam's idolatry, and not have suffered his sons to attend his altars, as, it should seem,

they did. Now, I. Whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God is not certain. One may hope that he did it in compassion to him, concluding he wanted refreshment, and out of a desire to be better acquainted with him and more fully to understand his errand than he could from the report of his sons; yet his sons having told him all that passed, and particularly that the prophet was forbidden to eat or drink there, which he had openly told Jeroboam, I suppose it was done with a bad design, to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him; for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, usually aiming to destroy them, but sometimes, as here, to debauch them and draw them from their duty. Thus they *gave the Nazarites wine to drink* (Amos ii. 12), that they might glory in their fall. But, 2. It is certain that he took a very bad method to bring him back. When the man of God had told him, "I may not, and therefore I will not, return to eat bread with thee" (his resolutions concurring with the divine command, v. 16, 17), he wickedly pretended that he had an order from heaven to fetch him back. He imposed upon him by asserting his quondam character as a prophet: *I am a prophet also as thou art*; he pretended he had a vision of an angel that sent him on this errand. But it was all a lie; it was a banter upon prophecy, and profane in the highest degree. When this old prophet is spoken of (2 Kings xxiii. 18) he is called *the prophet that came out of Samaria*, whereas there was no such place as Samaria till long after, ch. xvi. 24. Therefore I take it he is so called there, though he was of Beth-el, because he was like those who were afterwards *the prophets of Samaria, who caused God's people Israel to err*, Jer. xxiii. 13.

II. The good prophet's weakness, in suffering himself to be thus imposed upon: *He went back with him*, v. 19. He that had resolution enough to refuse the invitation of the king, who promised him a reward, could not resist the insinuations of one that pretended to be a prophet. Good people are more in danger of being drawn from their duty by the plausible pretences of divinity and sanctity than by external inducements; we have therefore need to *beware of false prophets, and not believe every spirit.*

III. The proceedings of divine justice hereupon; and here we may well wonder that the wicked prophet, who told the lie and did the mischief, went unpunished, while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and severely punished for it. What shall we make of this! The judgments of God are unfathomable. *The deceived and the deceiver are his*, and he *giveth not account of any of his matters.* Certainly there must be a judgment to come, when these things will be called over again, and when those that sinned most and suffered

least, in this world, will receive according to their works. 1. The message delivered to the man of God was strange. His crime is recited, *v.* 21, 22. It was, in one word, disobedience to an express command. Judgment is given upon it: *Thy carcase shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers, that is, "Thou shalt never reach thy own house, but shalt be a carcase quickly, nor shall thy dead body be brought to the place of thy fathers' sepulchres, to be interred."* 2. Yet it was more strange that the old prophet himself should be the messenger. Of this we can give no account but that God would have it so, as he spoke to Balaam by his ass and read Saul his doom by the devil in Samuel's likeness. We may think God designed hereby, (1.) To startle the lying prophet, and make him sensible of his sin. The message could not but affect him the more when he himself had the delivering of it, and had so strong an impression made upon his spirit by it that he cried out, as one in an agony, *v.* 21. He had reason to think, if he must die for his disobedience in a small matter who sinned by surprise, of how much sorer punishment he should be thought worthy who had belied an angel of God and cheated a man of God by a deliberate forgery. *If this were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* Perhaps it had a good effect upon him. Those who preach God's wrath to others have hard hearts indeed if they fear it not themselves. (2.) To put the greater mortification upon the prophet that was deceived, and to show what those must expect who hearken to the great deceiver. Those that yield to him as a tempter will be terrified by him as a tormentor; whom he now fawns upon he will afterwards fly upon, and whom he now draws into sin he will do what he can to drive to despair.

23 And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, *to wit,* for the prophet whom he had brought back. 24 And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was east in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. 25 And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told *it* in the city where the old prophet dwelt. 26 And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard *thereof*, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn

him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. 27 And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled *him*. 28 And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. 29 And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and to bury him. 30 And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, *saying*, Alas, my brother! 31 And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: 32 For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Beth-el, and against all the houses of the high places which *are* in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass. 33 After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became *one* of the priests of the high places. 34 And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut *it* off, and to destroy *it* from off the face of the earth.

Here is, 1. The death of the deceived disobedient prophet. The old prophet that had deluded him, as if he would make him some amends for the wrong he had done him or help to prevent the mischief threatened him, furnished him with an ass to ride home on; but by the way a lion set upon him, and killed him, *v.* 23, 24. He did but return back to refresh himself when he was hungry, and behold he must die for it; see 1 Sam. xiv. 43. But we must consider, 1. That his offence was great, and it would by no means justify him that he was drawn into it by a lie; he could not be so certain of the countermand sent by another as he was of the command given to himself, nor had he any ground to think that the command would be recalled, when the reason of it remained in force, which was that he might testify his detestation of the wickedness of that place. He had great reason to suspect the honesty

of this old prophet, who did not himself bear his testimony, nor did God think fit to make use of him as a witness against the idolatry of the city he lived in. However, he should have taken time to beg direction from God, and not have complied so soon. Did he think this old prophet's house safer to eat in than other houses at Beth-el, when God had forbidden him to eat in any? That was to refine upon the command, and make himself wiser than God. Did he think to excuse himself that he was hungry? Had he never read that *man lives not by bread alone*? 2. That his death was for the glory of God; for by this it appeared, (1.) That nothing is more provoking to him than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, which makes his proceedings against our first parents, for eating the forbidden fruit, the easier to be accounted for. (2.) That God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, his nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. Perhaps God by this intended, in a way of righteous judgment, to harden Jeroboam's heart, since he was not reformed by the withering of his hand; for he would be apt to make a bad use of it, and to say that the prophet was well enough served for meddling with his altar, he had better have staid at home; nay, he would say that Providence had punished him for his insolence, and the lion had done that which his withered hand might not do. However, by this God intended to warn all those whom he employs strictly to observe their orders, at their peril.

II. The wonderful preservation of his dead body, which was a token of God's mercy remembered in the midst of wrath. The lion that gently strangled him, or tore him, did not devour his dead body, nor so much as tear the ass, *v. 24, 25, 28*. Nay, what was more, he did not set upon the travellers that passed by and saw it, nor upon the old prophet (who had reason enough to fear it) when he came to take up the corpse. His commission was to kill the prophet; hitherto he should go, but no further. Thus God showed that, though he was angry with him, his anger was turned away, and the punishment went *no farther than death*.

III. The care which the old prophet took of his burial. When he heard of this unusual accident, he concluded it was the *man of God, who was disobedient to his Master* (and whose fault was that?), *therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion, v. 26*. It would well have become him to ask why the lion was not sent against him and his house, rather than against the good man whom he had cheated. He *took up the corpse, v. 29*. If there be any truth in the vulgar opinion, surely the corpse bled afresh when he touched it, for he was in effect the murderer, and it

was but a poor reparation for the injury to inter the dead body. Perhaps when he cheated him into his ruin he intended to laugh at him; yet now his conscience so far relents that he weeps over him, and, like Joab at Abner's funeral, is compelled to be a mourner for him whom he had been the death of. They said, *Alos! my brother, v. 30*. The case was indeed very lamentable that so good a man, a prophet so faithful, and so bold in God's cause, should, for one offence, die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power. *Thy way, O God! is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters*. We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some the flesh is destroyed that the spirit may be saved, while with others the flesh is pampered that the soul may ripen for hell.

IV. The charge which the old prophet gave his sons concerning his own burial, that they should be sure to bury him in the same grave where the man of God was buried (*v. 3*): "*Lay my bones beside his bones, close by them, as near as may be, so that my dust may mingle with his.*" Though he was a lying prophet, yet he desired to *die the death of a true prophet*. "Gather not my soul with the sinners of Beth-el, but with the man of God." The reason he gives is because *what he cried against the altar of Beth-el, that men's bones should be burnt upon it, shall surely come to pass, v. 32*. Thus, 1. He ratifies the prediction, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses* (and one of them such a one as St. Paul quotes, Titus i. 12, *one of themselves, even a prophet of their own*) *the word might be established*, if possible to convince and reclaim Jeroboam. 2. He does honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose *word* would not fall to the ground, though *he* did. Ministers die, die prematurely it may be; but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and does not die with them. 3. He consults his own interest. It was foretold that men's bones should be burnt upon Jeroboam's altar: "*Lay mine* (says he) *close to his, and then they will not be disturbed;*" and it was, accordingly, their security, as we find, *2 Kings xxiii. 18*. Sleeping and waking, living and dying, it is safe being in good company. No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb; but it is spoken of *2 Kings xxiii. 17*, where Josiah asks, *What title is that?* and is told, *It is the sepulchre of the man of God that came from Judah, who proclaimed these things which thou hast done;* so that the epitaph upon the prophet's grave preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Beth-el, which it would not have been so remarkably if he had died and been buried elsewhere. The cities of Israel are here called *cities of Samaria*, though that

name was not yet known; for, however the old prophet spoke, the inspired historian wrote in the language of his own time.

V. The obstinacy of Jeroboam in his idolatry (v. 33): *He returned not from his evil way*; some hand was found that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly because the prophet who disturbed him before was in his grave (Rev. xi. 10) and because the prophecy was for a great while to come. Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but neither threats nor signs, neither judgments nor mercies, wrought upon him, so strangely was he wedded to his calves. He did not reform, no, not his priesthood, but whoever would, he filled his hand, and made him priest, though ever so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever; *and this became sin*, that is, a snare first, and then a ruin, to Jeroboam's house, to *cut it off*, v. 34. Note, The diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, are the fruit of sin; he promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it, and sunk his family. Those betray themselves that think by any sin to support themselves.

#### CHAP. XIV.

The kingdom being divided into that of Judah and that of Israel, we must henceforward, in these books of Kings, expect and attend their separate history, the succession of their kings, and the affairs of their kingdoms, accounted for distinctly. In this chapter we have, I. The prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's house, ver. 7-16. The sickness of his child was the occasion of it (ver. 1-6), and the death of his child the earnest of it (ver. 17, 18), together with the conclusion of his reign, ver. 19, 20. II. The history of the declension and diminution of Rehoboam's house and kingdom (ver. 21-28), and the conclusion of his reign, ver. 29-31. In both we may read the mischievous consequences of sin and the calamities it brings on kingdoms and families.

**A**T that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. 2 And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Abijah the prophet, which told me that *I should be king* over this people. 3 And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child. 4 And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Abijah. But Abijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age. 5 And the LORD said unto Abijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall

feign herself *to be another woman*. 6 And it was so, when Abijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam: why feignest thou thyself *to be another*? for *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings*.

How Jeroboam persisted in his contempt of God and religion we read in the close of the foregoing chapter. Here we are told how God proceeded in his controversy with him; for when God judges he will overcome, and sinners shall either bend or break before him.

I. His child fell sick, v. 1. It is probable that he was his eldest son, and heir-apparent to the crown; for at his death all the kingdom went into mourning for him, v. 13. His dignity as a prince, his age as a young prince, and his interest in heaven as a pious prince, could not exempt him from sickness, dangerous sickness. Let none be secure of the continuance of their health, but improve it, while it continues, for the best purposes. Lord, behold, *he whom thou lovest*, thy favourite, he whom Israel loves, their darling, is sick. *At that time*, when Jeroboam prostituted and profaned the priesthood (ch. xiii. 33), his child sickened. When sickness comes into our families we should enquire whether there be not some particular sin harboured in our houses, which the affliction is sent to convince us of and reclaim us from.

II. He sent his wife in disguise to enquire of Abijah the prophet *what should become of the child*, v. 2, 3. The sickness of his child touched him in a tender part. The withering of this branch of the family would, perhaps, be as sore an affliction to him as the withering of that branch of his body, ch. xiii. 4. Such is the force of natural affection; our children are ourselves but once removed. Now,

1. Jeroboam's great desire, under this affliction, is to know *what shall become of the child*, whether he will live or die. (1.) It would have been more prudent if he had desired to know what means they should use for the recovery of the child, what they should give him, and what they should do to him; but by this instance, and those of Ahaziah (2 Kings i. 2) and Benhadad (2 Kings viii. 8), it should seem they had then such a foolish notion of fatality as took them off from all use of means; for, if they were sure the patient would live, they thought means needless; if he would die, they thought them useless; not considering that duty is ours, events are God's, and that he that ordained the end ordained the means. Why should a prophet be desired to show that which a little time will show? (2.) It would have been more pious if he had desired to know wherefore God contended with him, had begged the prophet's prayers, and cast

away his idols from him; then the child might have been restored to him, as his hand was. But most people would rather be told their fortune than their faults or their duty.

2. That he might know the child's doom, he sent to Ahijah the prophet, who lived obscurely and neglected in Shiloh, blind through age, yet still blest with the visions of the Almighty, which need not bodily eyes, but are rather favoured by the want of them, the eyes of the mind being then most intent and least diverted. Jeroboam sent not to him for advice about the setting up of his calves, or the consecrating of his priests, but had recourse to him in his distress, when the gods he served could give him no relief. *Lord, in trouble have those visited thee who before slighted thee.* Some have by sickness been reminded of their forgotten ministers and praying friends. He sent to Ahijah, because he had *told him he should be king, v. 2* "He was once the messenger of good tidings, surely he will be so again." Those that by sin disqualify themselves for comfort, and yet expect their ministers, because they are good men, should speak peace and comfort to them, greatly wrong both themselves and their ministers.

3. He sent his wife to enquire of the prophet, because she could best put the question without naming names, or making any other description than this, "Sir, I have a son ill; will he recover or not?" The heart of her husband safely trusted in her that she would be faithful both in delivering the message and bringing him the answer; and it seems there were none of all his counsellors in whom he could repose such a confidence; otherwise the sick child could very ill spare her, for mothers are the best nurses, and it would have been much fitter for her to have staid at home to tend him than go to Shiloh to enquire what would become of him. If she go, she must go *incognito—in disguise*, must change her dress, cover her face, and go by another name, not only to conceal herself from her own court and the country through which she passed (as if it were below her quality to go upon such an errand, and what she had reason to be ashamed of, as Nicodemus that came to Jesus by night, whereas it is no disparagement to the greatest to attend God's prophets), but also to conceal herself from the prophet himself, that he might only answer her question concerning her son, and not enter upon the unpleasing subject of her husband's defection. Thus some people love to prescribe to their ministers, limit them to smooth things, and care not for having the *whole counsel of God declared* to them, lest it prove to prophesy *no good concerning them, but evil.* But what a strange notion had Jeroboam of God's prophet when he believed that he could and would certainly tell what would *become of the child*, and yet either could not or would not discover who was the mother! Could he see into the thick

darkness of futurity, and yet not see through the thin veil of this disguise? Did Jeroboam think the God of Israel like his calves, just what he pleased? *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.*

III. God gave Ahijah notice of the approach of Jeroboam's wife, and that she came in disguise, and full instructions what to say to her (*v. 5*), which enabled him, as she came in at the door, to call her by her name, to her great surprise, and so to discover to all about him who she was (*v. 6*): *Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thyself to be another?* He had no regard, 1. To her rank. She was a queen, but what was that to him, who had a message to deliver to her immediately from God, before whom all the children of men stand upon the same level? Nor, 2. To her present. It was usual for those who consulted prophets to bring them tokens of respect, which they accepted, and yet were no hirelings. She brought him a handsome country present (*v. 3*), but he did not think himself obliged by that to give her any finer language than the nature of her message required. Nor, 3. To her industrious concealment of herself. It is a piece of civility not to take notice of those who desire not to be taken notice of; but the prophet was no courtier, nor gave flattering titles; plain dealing is best, and she shall know, at the first word, what she has to trust to: *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.* Note, Those who think by their disguises to hide themselves from God will be wretchedly confounded when they find themselves disappointed in the day of discovery. Sinners now appear in the garb of saints, and are taken to be such; but how will they blush and tremble when they find themselves stripped of their false colours, and are called by their own name: "Go out, thou treacherous false-hearted hypocrite. *I never knew thee. Why feignest thou thyself to be another?*" Tidings of a portion with hypocrites will be heavy tidings. God will judge men according to what they are, not according to what they seem.

7 Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, 8 And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; 9 But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke

me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: 10 Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. 11 Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. 12 Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. 13 And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. 14 Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. 15 For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. 16 And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. 17 And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; 18 And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet. 19 And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 20 And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

When those that set up idols, and keep them up, go to enquire of the Lord, he de-

termines to answer them, not according to the pretensions of their enquiry, but according to the multitude of their idols, Ezek. xiv. 4. So Jeroboam is answered here.

1. The prophet anticipates the enquiry concerning the child, and foretels the ruin of Jeroboam's house for the wickedness of it. No one else durst have carried such a message: a servant would have smothered it, but his own wife cannot be suspected of ill-will to him.

1. God calls himself the Lord God of Israel. Though Israel had forsaken God, God had not cast them off, nor given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms. He is Israel's God, and therefore will take vengeance on him who did them the greatest mischief he could do them, debauched them and drew them away from God.

2. He upbraids Jeroboam with the great favour he had bestowed upon him, in making him king, exalting him from among the people, the common people, to be prince over God's chosen Israel, and taking the kingdom from the house of David, to bestow it upon him. Whether we keep an account of God's mercies to us or no, he does, and will set even them in order before us, if we be ungrateful, to our greater confusion; otherwise he gives and upbraids not.

3. He charges him with his impiety and apostasy, and his idolatry particularly: *Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee*, v. 9. Saul, that was rejected, never worshipped idols; Solomon did it but occasionally, in his dotage, and never made Israel to sin. Jeroboam's calves, though pretended to be set up in honour of the God of Israel, that brought them up out of Egypt, yet are here called *other gods*, or *strange gods*, because in them he worshipped God as the heathen worshipped their strange gods, because by them he *changed the truth of God into a lie* and represented him as altogether different from what he is, and because many of the ignorant worshippers terminated their devotion in the image, and did not at all regard the God of Israel. Though they were calves of gold, the richness of the metal was so far from making them acceptable to God that they *provoked him to anger*, designedly affronted him, under colour of pleasing him. In doing this, (1.) He had not set David before him (v. 8): *Thou hast not been as my servant David*, who, though he had his faults and some bad ones, yet never forsook the worship of God nor grew loose nor cold to that; his faithful adherence to that gained him this honourable character, that he *followed God with all his heart*, and herein he was proposed for an example to all his successors. Those did not do well that did not do like David. (2.) He had not *set God before him*, but (v. 9), "*Thou hast cast me behind thy back, my law, my fear; thou hast neglected me, forgotten me, and preferred the policies before my precepts.*"

4. He foretels the utter ruin of Jeroboam's house, v. 10, 11. He thought, by his idolatry, to establish his government, and by that he not only lost it, but brought destruction upon his family, the universal destruction of all the males, whether shut up or left, married or unmarried. (1.) Shameful destruction. They shall be taken away as dung, which is loathsome and which men are glad to be rid of. He worshipped dunghill-deities, and God removed his family as a great dunghill. Noble and royal families, if wicked, are no better in God's account. (2.) Unusual destruction. Their very dead bodies should be meat for the dogs in the street, or the birds of prey in the field, v. 11. Thus evil pursues sinners. See this fulfilled, *ch. xv. 29.*

5. He foretels the immediate death of the sick child, v. 12, 13.

(1.) In mercy to him, lest, if he live, he be infected with the sin, and so involved in the ruin, of his father's house. Observe the character given of him: *In him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.* He had an affection for the true worship of God and disliked the worship of the calves. Note, [1.] Those are good in whom are good things towards the Lord God of Israel, good inclinations, good intentions, good desires, towards him. [2.] Where there is but some good thing of that kind it will be found: God, who seeks it, sees it be it ever so little and is pleased with it. [3.] A little grace goes a great way with great people. It is so rare to find princes well affected to religion that, when they are so, they are worthy of double honour. [4.] Pious dispositions are in a peculiar manner amiable and acceptable when they are found in those that are young. The divine image in miniature has a peculiar beauty and lustre in it. [5.] Those that are good in bad times and places shine very brightly in the eyes of God. A good child in the house of Jeroboam is a miracle of divine grace: to be there untainted is like being in the fiery furnace unhurt, unscathed. Observe the care taken of him: he only, of all Jeroboam's family, shall die in honour, shall be buried, and shall be lamented as one that lived desired. Note, Those that are distinguished by divine grace shall be distinguished by divine providence. This hopeful child dies first of all the family, for God often takes those soonest whom he loves best. Heaven is the fittest place for them; this earth is not worthy of them.

(2.) In wrath to the family. [1.] It was a sign the family would be ruined when he was taken by whom it might have been reformed. The righteous are removed from the evil to come in this world, to the good to come in a better world. It is a bad omen to a family when the best in it are buried out of it; when what was valuable is picked out the rest is for the fire. [2.] It was likewise a present affliction to the family and kingdom,

by which both ought to have been bettered; and this aggravated the affliction to the poor mother that she should not reach home time enough to see her son alive: *When thy feet enter into the city, just then the child shall die.* This was to be a sign to her of the accomplishment of the rest of the threatenings, as 1 Sam. ii. 34.

6. He foretels the setting up of another family to rule over Israel, v. 14. This was fulfilled in Baasha of Issachar, who conspired against Nadab the son of Jeroboam, in the second year of his reign, murdered him and all his family. "*But what? Even now.* Why do I speak of it as a thing at a distance? It is at the door. It shall be done *even now.*" Sometimes God makes quick work with sinners; he did so with the house of Jeroboam. It was not twenty-four years from his first elevation to the final extirpation of his family.

7. He foretels the judgments which should come upon the people of Israel for conforming to the worship which Jeroboam had established. *If the blind lead the blind, both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall into the ditch.* It is here foretold, v. 15, (1.) That they should never be easy, nor rightly settled in their land, but continually shaken like a reed in the water. After they left the house of David, the government never continued long in one family, but one undermined and destroyed another, which must needs occasion great disorders and disturbances among the people. (2.) That they should, ere long, be totally expelled out of their land, that good land, and given up to ruin, v. 16. This was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria. Families and kingdoms are ruined by sin, ruined by the wickedness of the heads of them. *Jeroboam did sin, and made Israel to sin.* If great men do wickedly, they involve many others both in the guilt and in the snare; multitudes follow their pernicious ways. They go to hell with a long train, and their condemnation will be the more intolerable, for they must answer, not only for their own sins, but for the sins which others have been drawn into and kept in by their influence.

II. Jeroboam's wife has nothing to say against the word of the Lord, but she goes home with a heavy heart to their house in Tirzah, a sweet delightful place, so the name signifies, famed for its beauty, Cant. vi. 4. But death, which will stain its beauty and embitter all its delights, cannot be shut out from it. Hither she came, and here we leave her attending the funeral of her son, and expecting the fate of her family. 1. *The child died* (v. 17), and justly did all Israel mourn, not only for the loss of so hopeful a prince, whom they were not worthy of, but because his death plucked up the flood-gates, and made a breach, at which an inundation of judgments broke in. 2. Jeroboam himself died soon after, v. 20. It is said (2 Chron.

xiii. 20), *The Lord struck him* with some sore disease, so that he died miserably, when he had reigned twenty-two years, and left his crown to a son who lost it, and his life too, and all the lives of his family, within two years after. For a further account of him the reader is referred to the annals of his reign, drawn up by his own secretaries, or to the public records, like those in the Tower, called here, *The Book*, or register, of the *Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*, to which recourse might then be had; but, not being divinely inspired, these records are long since lost.

21 And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. 22 And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. 23 For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. 24 And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations which the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 25 And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: 26 And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 27 And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house. 28 And it was so, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber. 29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 30 And there was war be-

tween Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. 31 And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

Judah's story and Israel's are intermixed in this book. Jeroboam out-lived Rehoboam, four or five years, yet his history is despatched first, that the account of Rehoboam's reign may be laid together; and a sad account it is.

I. Here is no good said of the king. All the account we have of him here is, 1. That he was forty-one years old when he began to reign, by which reckoning he was born in the last year of David, and had his education, and the forming of his mind, in the best days of Solomon; yet he lived not up to these advantages. Solomon's defection at last did more to corrupt him than his wisdom and devotion had done to give him good principles. 2. That he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city where God put his name, where he had opportunity enough to know his duty, if he had but had a heart to do it. 3. That his mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess; this is twice mentioned, r. 21, 31. It was strange that David would marry his son Solomon to an Ammonitess (for it was done while he lived), but it is probable that Solomon was in love with her, because she was *Naamah, a beauty* (so it signifies), and his father was loth to cross him, but it proved to have a very bad influence upon posterity. Probably she was daughter to Shobi the Ammonite, who was kind to David (2 Sam. xvii. 27), and David was too willing to requite him by matching his son into his family. None can imagine how lasting and how fatal the consequences may be of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. 4. That he had continual war with Jeroboam (r. 30), which could not but be a perpetual uneasiness to him. 5. That when he had reigned but seventeen years he died, and left his throne to his son. His father, and grandfather, and grandson, that reigned well, reigned long, forty years apiece. But sin often shortens men's lives and comforts.

II. Here is much evil said of the subjects, both as to their character and their condition.

1. See here how wicked and profane they were. It is a most sad account that is here given of their apostasy from God, r. 22—24. Judah, the only professing people God had in the world, *did evil in his sight*, in contempt and defiance of him and the tokens of his special presence with them; *they provoked him to jealousy*, as the adulterous wife provokes her husband by breaking the marriage-covenant. Their fathers had been bad enough, especially in the times of the judges, but they



did abominable things, *above all that their fathers had done*. The magnificence of their temple, the pomp of their priesthood, and all the secular advantages with which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them to it. Nothing less than the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high* will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him. The account here given of the wickedness of the Jews agrees with that which the apostle gives of the wickedness of the Gentile world (Rom. i. 21, 24), so that both *Jew and Gentile are alike under sin*, Rom. iii. 9. (1.) They became *vain in their imaginations* concerning God, and *changed his glory into an image*, for they built themselves *high places, images, and groves* (v. 23), profaning God's name by affixing to it their images, and God's ordinances by serving their idols with them. They foolishly fancied that they exalted God when they worshipped him on high hills and pleased him when they worshipped him under the pleasant shadow of green trees. (2.) They were given up to vile affections (as those idolaters Rom. i. 26, 27), for there were *sodomites in the land* (v. 24), *men with men working that which is unseemly*, and not to be thought of, much less mentioned, without abhorrence and indignation. They dishonoured God by one sin and then God left them to dishonour themselves by another. They profaned the privileges of a holy nation, therefore God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, to imitate the abominations of the accursed Canaanites; and herein the Lord was righteous. And, when they did *like those that were cast out*, how could they expect any other than to be cast out like them?

2. See here how weak and poor they were; and this was the consequence of the former. Sin exposes, impoverishes, and weakens any people. Shishak, king of Egypt, came against them, and so far, either by force or surrender, made himself master of Jerusalem itself that he took away the treasures both of the temple and of the exchequer, of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, which David and Solomon had amassed, v. 25, 26. These, it is likely, tempted him to make his descent; and, to save the rest, Rehoboam perhaps tamely surrendered them, as Ahab, *ch. xx. 4*. He also took away the golden shields that were made but in his father's time, v. 26. These the king of Egypt carried off as trophies of his victory; and, instead of them, Rehoboam made brazen shields, which the life-guard carried before him when he went to church in state, v. 27, 28. This was an emblem of the diminution of his glory. Sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass. We commend Rehoboam for going to *the house of the Lord*, perhaps the oftener for the rebuke he had been under, and do not condemn him for going in pomp. Great men should honour God with their honour, and then they are themselves most honoured by it.

## CHAP. XV.

In this chapter we have an abstract of the history, I. Of two of the kings of Judah, Abijam, the days of whose reign were few and evil (ver. 1-8), and Asa, who reigned well and long, ver. 9-24. II. Of two of the kings of Israel, Nadab the son of Jeroboam, and Baasha the destroyer of Jeroboam's house, ver. 25-34.

**N**OW in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah. 2 Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. 3 And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. 4 Nevertheless for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: 5 Because David did *that which was right* in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6 And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. 7 Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. 8 And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the short reign of Abijam the son of Rehoboam king of Judah. He makes a better figure, 2 Chron. xiii., where we have an account of his war with Jeroboam, the speech which he made before the armies engaged, and the wonderful victory he obtained by the help of God. There he is called *Abijah—My father is the Lord*, because no wickedness is there laid to his charge. But here, where we are told of his faults, *Jah*, the name of God, is, in disgrace to him, taken away from his name, and he is called *Abijam*. See Jer. xxii. 24.

I. Few particulars are related concerning him. 1. Here began his reign in the beginning of Jeroboam's eighteenth year; for Rehoboam reigned but seventeen, *ch. xiv. 21*. Jeroboam indeed survived Rehoboam, but Rehoboam's Abijah lived to succeed him and to be a terror to Jeroboam, while Jeroboam's Abijah (whom we read of *ch. xiv. 1*) died before him. 2. He reigned scarcely three years, for he died before the end of Jeroboam's twentieth year, v. 9. Being made

proud and secure by his great victory over Jeroboam (2 Chron. xiii. 21), God cut him off, to make way for his son Asa, who would be a better man. 3. *His mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom*, that is, Absalom, David's son, as I am the rather inclined to think because two other of Rehoboam's wives were his near relations (2 Chron. xi. 18), one the daughter of Jerimoth, David's son, and another the daughter of Eliab, David's brother. He took warning by his father not to marry strangers; yet thought it below him to marry his subjects, except they were of the royal family. 4. He carried on his father's wars with Jeroboam. As there was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, not set battles (these were forbidden, *ch.* xii. 24), but frequent encounters, especially upon the borders, one making incursions and reprisals on the other, so there was between Abijam and Jeroboam (*r.* 7), till Jeroboam, with a great army, invaded him, and then Abijam, not being forbidden to act in his own defence, routed him, and weakened him, so that he compelled him to be quiet during the rest of his reign, 2 Chron. xiii. 20.

II. But, in general, we are told, 1. That he was not like David, had no hearty affection for the ordinances of God, though, to serve his purpose against Jeroboam, he pleaded his possession of the temple and priesthood, as that upon which he valued himself, 2 Chron. xiii. 10—12. Many boast of their profession of godliness who are strangers to the power of it, and plead the truth of their religion who yet are not true to it. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God.* He seemed to have zeal, but he wanted sincerity; he began pretty well, but he fell off, and *walked in all the sins of his father*, followed his bad example, though he had seen the bad consequences of it. He that was all his days in war ought to have been so wise as to make and keep his peace with God, and not to make him his enemy, especially having found him so good a friend in his war with Jeroboam, 2 Chron. xiii. 18. *Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*, Isa. xxvi. 10. 2. That yet it was for David's sake that he was advanced, and continued upon the throne; it was *for his sake* (*r.* 4, 5) that God thus *set up his son after him*; not for his own sake, nor for the sake of his father, in whose steps he trod, *but for the sake of David*, whose example he would not follow. Note, It aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors and owe their blessings to it, and yet will not imitate it. They stand upon that ground, and yet despise it, and trample upon it, and unreasonably ridicule and oppose that which they enjoy the benefit of. The kingdom of Judah was supported, (1.) That David might have a lamp, pursuant to the divine ordination of a lamp for his

*anointed*, Ps. cxxxiii. 17. (2.) That Jerusalem might be established, not only that the honours put upon it in David's and Solomon's time might be preserved to it, but that it might be reserved to the honours designed for it in after-times. The character here given of David is very great—*that he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*; but the exception is very remarkable—*save only in the matter of Uriah*, including both his murder and the debauching of his wife. That was a bad matter; it was a remaining blot upon his name, a bar in his escutcheon, and the reproach of it was not wiped away, though the guilt was. David was guilty of other faults, but they were nothing in comparison of that; yet even that being repented of, though it be mentioned for warning to others, did not prevail to throw him out of the covenant, nor to cut off the entail of the promise upon his seed.

9 And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah. 10 And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. 11 And Asa did *that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, as *did* David his father. 12 And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. 13 And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. 14 But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days. 15 And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the Lord, silver, and gold, and vessels. 16 And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 17 And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 18 Then Asa took all the silver and the gold *that were* left in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Ben-hadad, the son of Tabrimon, the

son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damaseus, saying, 19 *There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.* 20 So Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21 And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *thereof*, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. 22 Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none *was* exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. 23 The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. 24 And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the reign of Asa; we shall find a more copious history of it 2 Chron. xiv., xv., and xvi. Here is,

I. The length of it: *He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem, v. 10.* In the account we have of the kings of Judah we find the number of the good kings and the bad ones nearly equal; but then we may observe, to our comfort, that the reign of the good kings was generally long, but that of the bad kings short, the consideration of which will make the state of God's church not altogether so bad within that period as it appears at first sight. Length of days is in Wisdom's right hand. *Honour thy father, much more thy heavenly Father, that thy days may be long.*

II. The general good character of it (v. 11): *Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and that is right indeed which is so in God's eyes; those are approved whom he commends.* He did *as did David his father*, kept close to God, and to his instituted worship, was hearty and zealous for that, which gave him this honourable character,

that he was like David, though he was not a prophet, or psalmist, as David was. If we come up to the graces of those that have gone before us it will be our praise with God, though we come short of their gifts. Asa was like David, though he was neither such a conqueror nor such an author; for *his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days (v. 14)*, that is, he was both cordial and constant in his religion. What he did for God he was sincere in, steady and uniform, and did it from a good principle, with a single eye to the glory of God.

III. The particular instances of Asa's piety. His times were times of reformation. For,

1. He removed that which was evil. There reformation begins; and a great deal of work of that kind his hand found to do. For, though it was but twenty years after the death of Solomon that he began to reign, yet very gross corruption had spread far and taken deep root. Immorality he first struck at: *He took away the sodomites out of the land*, suppressed the brothels; for how can either prince or people prosper while those cages of unclean and filthy birds, more dangerous than pest-houses, are suffered to remain? Then he proceeded against idolatry: *He removed all the idols, even those that his father had made, v. 12.* His father having made them, he was the more concerned to remove them, that he might cut off the entail of the curse, and prevent the visiting of that iniquity upon him and his. Nay (which redounds much to his honour, and shows his heart was perfect with God), when he found idolatry in the court, he rooted it out thence, v. 13. When it appeared that Maachah his mother, or rather his grandmother (but called his *mother* because she had the educating of him in his childhood), had an idol in a grove, though she was his mother, his grandmother,—though, it is likely, she had a particular fondness for it,—though, being old, she could not live long to patronise it,—though she kept it for her own use only, yet he would by no means connive at her idolatry. Reformation must begin at home. Bad practices will never be suppressed in the country while they are supported in the court. Asa, in every thing else, will honour and respect his mother; he loves her well, but he loves God better, and (like the Levite, Deut. xxxiii. 9) readily forgets the relation when it comes in competition with his duty. If she be an idolater, (1.) Her idol shall be destroyed, publicly exposed to contempt, defaced, and burnt to ashes *by the brook Kidron*, on which, it is probable, he strewed the ashes, in imitation of Moses (Exod. xxxii. 20) and in token of his detestation of idolatry and his indignation at it wherever he found it. Let no remains of a court-idol appear. (2.) She shall be *deposed*. He removed her from being queen, or from the queen, that is, from conversing with his wife; he banished her from the court, and

confined her to an obscure and private life. Those that have power are happy when thus they have hearts to use it well.

2. He re-established that which was good (v. 15): He brought into the house of God the dedicated things which he himself had vowed out of the spoils of the Ethiopians he had conquered, and which his father had vowed, but lived not to bring in pursuant to his vow. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well, not only cast away the idols of our iniquity, but dedicate ourselves and our all to God's honour and glory. When those who, in their infancy, were by baptism devoted to God, make it their own act and deed to join themselves to him and vigorously employ themselves in his service, this is bringing in the dedicated things which they and their fathers have dedicated: it is necessary justice—rendering to God the things that are his.

IV. The policy of his reign. He built cities himself, to encourage the increase of his people (v. 23) and to invite others to him by the conveniences of habitation; and he was very zealous to hinder Baasha from building Ramah, because he designed it for the cutting off of communication between his people and Jerusalem and to hinder those who in obedience to God would come to worship there. An enemy must by no means be suffered to fortify a frontier town.

V. The faults of his reign. In both the things for which he was praised he was found defective. The fairest characters are not without some *but* or other in them. 1. Did he take away the idols? That was well; but the high places were not removed (v. 14); therein his reformation fell short. He removed all images which were rivals with the true God or false representations of him; but the altars which were set up in high places, and to which those sacrificees were brought which should have been offered on the altar in the temple, those he suffered to stand, thinking there was no great harm in them, they having been used by good men before the temple was built, and being loth to disoblige the people, who had a kindness to them and were wedded to them both by custom and convenience; whereas in Judah and Benjamin, the only tribes under Asa's government which lay so near Jerusalem and the altars there, there was less pretence for them than in those tribes which lay more remote. They were against the law, which obliged them to worship at one place, Dent. xii. 11. They lessened men's esteem of the temple and the altars there, and were an open gap for idolatry to enter in at, while the people were so much addicted to it. It was not well that Asa, when his hand was in, did not remove these. Nevertheless his heart was perfect with the Lord. This affords us a comfortable note, That those may be found honest and upright with God, and be accepted of him, who yet, in some instances, come short of doing the good they might and

should do. The perfection which is made the indispensable condition of the new covenant is not to be understood of sinlessness (then we were all undone), but sincerity. 2. Did he bring in the dedicated things? That was well; but he afterwards alienated the dedicated things, when he took the gold and silver out of the house of God and sent them as a bribe to Benhadad, to hire him to break his league with Baasha, and, by making an inroad upon his country, to give him a diversion from the building of Ramah, v. 18, 19. Here he sinned, (1.) In tempting Benhadad to break his league, and so to violate the public faith. If he did wrong in doing it, as certainly he did, Asa did wrong in persuading him to do it. (2.) In that he could not trust God, who had done so much for him, to free him out of this strait, without using such indirect means to help himself. (3.) In taking the gold out of the treasury of the temple, which was not to be made use of but on extraordinary occasions. The project succeeded. Benhadad made a descent upon the land of Israel, which obliged Baasha to retire with his whole force from Ramah (v. 20, 21), which gave Asa a fair opportunity to demolish his works there, and the timber and stones served him for the building of some cities of his own, v. 22. But, though the design prospered, we find it was displeasing to God; and though Asa valued himself upon the policy of it, and promised himself that it would effectually secure his peace, he was told by the prophet that he had done foolishly, and that *thenceforth he should have wars*; see 2 Chron. xvi. 7—9.

VI. The troubles of his reign. For the most part he prospered; but, 1. Baasha king of Israel was a very troublesome neighbour to him. He reigned twenty-four years, and all his days had war, more or less, with Asa, v. 16. This was the effect of the division of the kingdoms, that they were continually vexing one another, and so weakened one another, which made them both an easier prey to the common enemy. 2. In his old age he was himself afflicted with the gout: He was *diseased in his feet*, which made him less fit for business and peevish towards those about him.

VII. The conclusion of his reign. The acts of it were more largely recorded in the common history (to which reference is here had, v. 23) than in this sacred one. He reigned long, but finished at last with honour, and left his throne to a successor no way inferior to him.

25 And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. 26 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin

wherewith he made Israel to sin. 27 And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. 28 Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. 29 And it came to pass, when he reigned, *that* he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: 30 Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger. 31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 32 And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years. 34 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

We are now to take a view of the miserable state of Israel, while the kingdom of Judah was happy under Asa's good government. It was threatened that they should be as a *reed shaken in the water* (*ch. xiv. 15*), and so they were, when, during the single reign of Asa, the government of their kingdom was in six or seven different hands, as we find in this and the following chapter. Jeroboam was upon the throne in the beginning of his reign and Abab at the end of it, and between them were Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri, undermining and destroying one another. This they got by deserting the house both of God and of David. Here we have, 1. The ruin and extirpation of the family of Jeroboam, according to the word of the Lord by Ahijah. His son Nadab succeeded him. If the death of his brother Abijah had had a due influence upon him to make him religious, and the honour done him at his death had engaged him to follow his good example, his reign might have been long and glorious; but he *walked in the way of his father* (*v. 26*), kept up the worship of

his calves, and forbade his subjects to go up to Jerusalem to worship, *sinned and made Israel to sin*, and therefore God brought ruin upon him quickly, in the second year of his reign. He was besieging Gibbethon, a city which the Philistines had taken from the Danites, and was endeavouring to re-take it; and there, in the midst of his army, did Baasha, with others, conspire against him and kill him (*v. 27*), and so little interest had he in the affections of his people that his army did not only not avenge his death, but chose his murderer for his successor. Whether Baasha did it upon a personal pique against Nadab, or to be avenged on the house of Jeroboam for some affront received from them, or whether under pretence of freeing his country from the tyranny of a bad prince, or whether merely from a principle of ambition, to make way for himself to the throne, does not appear; but he *slew him, and reigned in his stead, v. 28*. And the first thing he did when he came to the crown was to *cut off all the house of Jeroboam*, that he might the better secure himself and his own usurped government. He thought it not enough to imprison or banish them, but he destroyed them, left not only no males (as was foretold, *ch. xiv. 10*), but none that breathed. Herein he was barbarous, but God was righteous. Jeroboam's sin was punished (*v. 30*); for those that provoke God do it *to their own confusion*; see Jer. vii. 19. Ahijah's prophecy was accomplished (*v. 29*); for no word of God shall fall to the ground. Divine threatenings are not bugbears. 2. The elevation of Baasha. He shall be tried awhile, as Jeroboam was. Twenty-four years he reigned (*v. 33*), but showed that it was not from any dislike to Jeroboam's sin that he destroyed his family, but from malice and ambition; for, when he had rooted out the sinner, he himself clave to the sin, and *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (*v. 34*), though he had seen the end of that way; so strangely was his heart hardened with the deceitfulness of sin.

## CHAP. XVI.

This chapter relates wholly to the kingdom of Israel, and the revolutions of that kingdom—many in a little time. The utter ruin of Jeroboam's family, after it had been twenty-four years a royal family, we read of in the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we have, I. The ruin of Baasha's family, after it had been but twenty-six years a royal family, foretold by a prophet (*ver. 1-7*), and executed by Zimri, one of his captains, *ver. 8-14*. II. The seven days' reign of Zimri, and his sudden fall, *ver. 15-20*. III. The struggle between Omri and Tibni, and Omri's prevalency, and his reign, *ver. 21-28*. IV. The beginning of the reign of Abab, of whom we shall afterwards read much, *ver. 29-32*. V. The rebuilding of Jericho, *v. 34*. All this while, in Judah, things went well.

**T**HEN the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; 3

Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat. 5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 6 So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead. 7 And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the LORD against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him. 8 In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years. 9 And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of his house in Tirzah. 10 And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead. 11 And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, *that* he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that pisseth against a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends. 12 Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, 13 For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Here is, I. The ruin of the family of

Baasha foretold. He was a man likely enough to have raised and established his family—active, politic, and daring; but he was an idolater, and this brought destruction upon his family.

1. God sent him warning of it before. (1.) That, if he were thereby wrought upon to repent and reform, the ruin might be prevented; for God threatens, that he may not strike, as one that desires not the death of sinners. (2.) That, if not, it might appear that the destruction when it did come, whoever might be instruments of it, was the act of God's justice and the punishment of sin.

2. The warning was sent by *Jehu the son of Hanani*. The father was a seer, or prophet, at the same time (2 Chron. xvi. 7), and was sent to Asa king of Judah; but the son, who was young and more active, was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel. *Juniores ad labores—Toil and adventure are for the young*. This Jehu was a prophet and the son of a prophet. Prophecy, thus happily entailed, was worthy of so much the more honour. This Jehu continued long in his usefulness, for we find him reproving Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xix. 2) above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, 2 Chron. xx. 34. The message which this prophet brought to Baasha is much the same with that which Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife.

(1.) He reminds Baasha of the great things God had done for him (r. 2): *I exalted thee out of the dust to the throne of glory*, a great instance of the divine sovereignty and power. 1 Sam. ii. 8. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was a hand of Providence in it, to bring about God's counsel, concerning Jeroboam's house; and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed does by no means amount to the patronising of his ambition and treachery. It is God that puts power into bad men's hands, which he makes to serve his good purposes, notwithstanding the bad use they make of it. *I made thee prince over my people*. God calls Israel his people still, though wretchedly corrupted, because they retained the covenant of circumcision, and there were many good people among them; it was not till long after that they were called *Loammi, not a people*, Hos. i. 9.

(2.) He charges him with high crimes and misdemeanours. [1.] That he had caused *Israel to sin*, had seduced God's subjects from their allegiance and brought them to pay to dunghill-deities the homage due to him only, and herein he had *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (r. 2), and been like his house, r. 7. [2.] That he had himself *provoked God to anger with the work of his hands*, that is, by worshipping images, the *work of men's hands*; though perhaps others made them, yet he served them and thereby avowed the making

of them, and they are therefore called the *work of his hands*. [3.] That he had *destroyed the house of Jeroboam* (v. 7), *because he killed him*, namely, Jeroboam's son and all his: if he had done that with an eye to God, to his will and glory, and from a holy indignation against the sins of Jeroboam and his house, he would have been accepted and applauded as a minister of God's justice; but, as he did it, he was only the tool of God's justice, but a servant to his own lusts, and is justly punished for the malice and ambition which actuated and governed him in all he did. Note, Those who are in any way employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God (magistrates or ministers) are concerned to do it from a good principle and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them and they make themselves obnoxious by it.

(3.) He foretels the same destruction to come upon his family which he himself had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam, v. 3, 4. Note, Those who resemble others in their sins may expect to resemble them in their plagues, especially those who seem zealous against such sins in others as they allow themselves in; the house of Jehu was reckoned with for the blood of the house of Ahab, Hos. i. 4.

II. A reprieve granted for some time, so long that Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour in his own royal city (v. 6), so far is he from being a prey either to the dogs or to the fowls, which yet was threatened to his house, v. 4. He lives not either to see or feel the punishment threatened, yet he was himself the greatest delinquent. Certainly there must be a future state, in which impenitent sinners will suffer in their own persons, and not escape, as often they do in this world. Baasha died under no visible stroke of divine vengeance for aught that appears, but *God laid up his iniquity for his children*, as Job speaks, ch. xxi. 19. Thus he often visits sin. Observe, Baasha is punished by the destruction of his children after his death, and his children are punished by the abuse of their bodies after their death; that is the only thing which the threatening specifies (v. 4), that the dogs and the fowls of the air should eat them, as if herein were designed a tacit intimation that there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the sorest punishments and are most to be dreaded; these judgments on the body and posterity signified judgments on the soul when separated from the body, by him who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*.

III. Execution done at last. Baasha's son Elah, like Jeroboam's son Nadab, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, one of his own soldiers, as Nadab was by Baasha; so like was his house made to that of Jeroboam, as was threatened, v. 3. Because his idolatry was like his, and one of the sins

for which God contended with him being the destruction of Jeroboam's family, the more the destruction of his own resembled that, the nearer did the punishment resemble the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

1. As then, so now, the king himself was first slain, but Elah fell more ingloriously than Nadab. Nadab was slain in the field of action and honour, he and his army then besieging Gibbethon (ch. xv. 27); but the siege being then raised upon that disaster, and the city remaining still in the Philistines' hands, the army of Israel was now renewing the attempt (v. 15) and Elah should have been with them to command in chief, but he loved his own ease and safety better than his honour or duty, or the public good, and therefore staid behind to take his pleasure; and, when he was *drinking himself drunk in his servant's house*, Zimri killed him, v. 9, 10. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those who designedly drink themselves drunk, that they know not but death may surprise them in that condition. (1.) Death comes easily upon men when they are drunk. Besides the chronic diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men in that condition are more easily overcome by an enemy, as Amnon by Absalom, and are liable to more bad accidents, being unable to help themselves. (2.) Death comes terribly upon men in that condition. Finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion, that day comes upon them *unawares* (Luke xxi. 34), like a thief.

2. As then, so now, the whole family was cut off, and rooted out. The traitor was the successor, to whom the unthinking people tamely submitted, as if it were all one to them what king they had, so that they had one. The first thing Zimri did was to *slay all the house of Baasha*; thus he held by cruelty what he got by treason. His cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's did against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah *none of his kinsfolks or friends* (v. 11), *none of his avengers* (so the word is), none that were likely to avenge his death; yet divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably that it was used as a proverb long after, *Had Zimri peace who slew his master?* 2 Kings ix. 31. In this, (1.) The word of God was fulfilled, r. 12. (2.) The sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they *provoked God by their vanities*, v. 13. Their idols are called their *vanities*, for they cannot profit nor help. Miserable are those whose deities are vanities.

15 In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. 16 And the people that were encamped

heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17 And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18 And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died, 19 For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin. 20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 21 Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. 22 But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. 23 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24 And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria. 25 But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 28 So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon observes (Prov. xxviii. 2) that for the transgression of a land many were the princes thereof (so it was here in Israel), but

by a man of understanding the state thereof shall be prolonged—so it was with Judah at the same time under Asa. When men forsake God they are out of the way of rest and establishment. Zimri, and Tibni, and Omri, are here striving for the crown. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin. These confusions end in the settlement of Omri; we must therefore take him along with us through this part of the story.

I. How he was chosen, as the Roman emperors often were, by the army in the field, now encamped before Gibbethon. Notice was soon brought thither that Zimri had slain their king (v. 16) and set up himself in Tirzah, the royal city, whereupon they chose Omri king in the camp, that they might without delay avenge the death of Elah upon Zimri. Though he was idle and intemperate, yet he was their king, and they would not tamely submit to his murderer, nor let the treason go unpunished. They did not attempt to avenge the death of Nadab upon Baasha, perhaps because the house of Baasha had ruled with more gentleness than the house of Jeroboam; but Zimri shall feel the resentments of the provoked army. The siege of Gibbethon is quitted (Philistines are sure to gain when Israelites quarrel) and Zimri is prosecuted.

II. How he conquered Zimri, who is said to have reigned seven days (v. 15), so long before Omri was proclaimed king and himself proclaimed traitor; but we may suppose it was a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to show his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God by supporting his idolatry, v. 19. Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it (v. 17), forced Zimri into the palace, which being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it, v. 18. Unwilling that his rival should ever enjoy that sumptuous palace, he burnt it; and fearing that if he fell into the hands of the army, either alive or dead, he should be ignominiously treated, he burnt himself in it. See what desperate practices men's wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin; see the disposition of incendiaries, who set palaces and kingdoms on fire, though they are themselves in danger of perishing in the flame.

III. How he struggled with Tibni, and at length got clear of him: *Half of the people followed this Tibni* (v. 21), probably those who were in Zimri's interest, with whom others joined, who would not have a king chosen in the camp (lest he should rule by the sword and a standing army), but in a convention of the states. The contest between these two lasted some years, and, it is likely, cost a great deal of blood on both sides, for it was in the twenty-seventh year of Asa



that Omri was first elected (v. 15) and thence the twelve years of his reign are to be dated; but it was not till the thirty-first year of Asa that he began to reign without a rival; then Tibni died, it is likely in battle, and Omri reigned, v. 22. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his History of the World (l. ii. c. 19 § 6), enquires here why it was that in all these confusions and revolutions of the kingdom of Israel they never thought of returning to the house of David, and uniting themselves again to Judah, *for then it was better with them than now*; and he thinks the reason was because the kings of Judah assumed a more absolute, arbitrary, and despotic power than the kings of Israel. It was the heaviness of the yoke that they complained of when they first revolted from the house of David, and the dread of that made them ever after averse to it, and attached to kings of their own, who ruled more by law and the rules of a limited monarchy.

IV. How he reigned when he was at length settled on the throne. 1. He made himself famous by building Samaria, which, ever after, was the royal city of the kings of Israel (the palace at Tirzah being burnt), and in process of time grew so considerable that it gave name to the middle part of Canaan (which lay between Galilee on the north and Judea on the south) and to the inhabitants of that country, who were called *Samaritans*. He bought the ground for *two talents of silver*, somewhat more than £700 of our money, for a talent was £353. 11s. 10½d. Perhaps Shemer, who sold him the ground, let him have it considerably the cheaper upon condition that the city should be called after his name, for otherwise it would have borne the name of the purchaser; it was called *Samaria*, or *Shemeren* (as it is in the Hebrew), from Shemer, the former owner, v. 24. The kings of Israel changed their royal seats, Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria; but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God. Those that cleave to the Lord fix, but those that leave him ever wander. 2. He made himself infamous by his wickedness; *for he did worse than all that were before him*, v. 25. Though he was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and Providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha. He went further than they had done in *establishing iniquity by a law*, and forcing his subjects to comply with him in it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made *Israel a desolation*, Mic. vi. 16. Jeroboam caused Israel to sin by temptation, example, and allurements; but Omri did it by compulsion.

V. How he ended his reign, v. 27, 28. He was in some repute for the might which he showed. Many a bad man has been a

stout man. He died in his bed, as did Jeroboam and Baasha themselves; but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then pay off the scores, of his iniquity.

29 And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. 30 And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32 And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. 34 In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded than of any of the kings of Israel. We have here only a general idea given us of him, as the worst of all the kings, that we may expect what the particulars will be. He reigned twenty-two years, long enough to do a great deal of mischief.

1. He exceeded all his predecessors in wickedness, *did evil above all that were before him* (v. 30), and, as if it were done with a particular enmity both to God and Israel, to affront him and ruin them, it is said, *He did more purposely to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger*, and, consequently, to send judgments on his land, *than all the kings of Israel that were before him*, v. 33. It was bad with the people when every successive king was worse than his predecessor. What would they come to at last? He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families; yet, instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened and enraged against God by it. He thought it a *light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam*, v. 31. It was nothing to break the second commandment by image-worship, he would set aside the first also by introducing other gods; his little finger should

fall heavier upon God's ordinances than Jeroboam's loins. Making light of less sins makes way for greater, and those that endeavour to extenuate other people's sins will but aggravate their own.

II. He married a wicked woman, who he knew would bring in the worship of Baal, and seemed to marry her with that design. *As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel* (r. 31), a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, addicted to witchcrafts and whoredoms (2 Kings ix. 22), and every way vicious. The false prophetess spoken of Rev. ii. 20 is there called *Jezebel*, for a wicked woman could not be called by a worse name than hers; what mischiefs she did, and what mischief at last befel her (2 Kings ix. 33), we shall find in the following story; this one strange wife debauched Israel more than all the strange wives of Solomon.

III. He set up the worship of Baal, forsok the God of Israel and served the god of the Sidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah, the sun (so some think), a deified hero of the Phenicians (so others): he was weary of the golden calves, and thought they had been worshipped long enough; such vanities were they that those who had been fondest of them at length grew sick of them, and, like adulterers, must have variety. In honour of this mock deity, whom they called *Baal—lord*, and for the convenience of his worship, 1. Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city, because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the royal city of the other kingdom. He would have Baal's temple near him, that he might the better frequent it, protect it, and put honour upon it. 2. He reared an altar in that temple, on which to offer sacrifice to Baal, by which they acknowledged their dependence upon him and sought his favour. O the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expense to make one their friend whom they might have chosen whether they would make a god of or no! 3. He made a grove about his temple, either a natural one, by planting shady trees there, or, if those would be too long in growing, an artificial one in imitation of it; for it is not said he *planted*, but he *made* a grove, something that answered the intention, which was to conceal and so countenance the abominable impurities that were committed in the filthy worship of Baal. *Lucus, à lucendo, quia non lucet—He that doeth evil hateth the light*

IV. One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had long since pronounced on him that should attempt it, r. 34. It comes in as an instance of the height of impiety to which men had arrived, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe, 1. How ill he did. Like Achan he

meddled with the accursed thing, turned that to his own use which was devoted to God's honour. He began to build, in defiance of the curse well known in Israel, jesting with it perhaps as a bugbear, or fancying its force worn out by length of time, for it was above 500 years since it was pronounced, Josh. vi. 26. He went on to build, in defiance of the execution of the curse in part; for, though his eldest son died when he began, yet he would proceed in contempt of God and his wrath revealed from heaven against his ungodliness. 2. How ill he sped. He built for his children, but God wrote him childless; his eldest son died when he began, the youngest when he finished, and all the rest (it is supposed) between. Note, Those whom God curses are cursed indeed; none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!

#### CHAP. XVII.

So sad was the character both of the princes and people of Israel, as described in the foregoing chapter, that one might have expected God would cast off a people that had so cast him off; but, as an evidence to the contrary, never was Israel so blessed with a good prophet as when it was so plagued with a bad king. Never was king so bold to sin as Ahab: never was prophet so bold to reprove and threaten as Elijah, whose story begins in this chapter and is full of wonders. Scarcely any part of the Old-Testament history shines brighter than this history of the spirit and power of Elias: he only, of all the prophets, had the honour of Enoch, the first prophet, to be translated, that he should not see death, and the honour of Moses, the great prophet, to attend our Saviour in his transfiguration. Other prophets prophesied and wrote, he prophesied and acted, but wrote nothing; but his actions cast more lustre on his name than their writings did on theirs. In this chapter we have, 1. His prediction of a famine in Israel, through the want of rain, ver. 1. 2. The provision made for him in that famine, v. 2. 3. By the ravens at the brook Cherith, ver. 2—7. 4. When that failed, by the widow at Zarephath, who received him in the name of a prophet and had a prophet's reward; for (1.) He multiplied her meal and her oil, ver. 8—16. (2.) He raised her dead son to life, ver. 17—24. Thus his story begins with judgments and miracles, designed to awaken that stupid generation that had so deeply corrupted themselves.

AND Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.* 2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 4 And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. 7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up,

because there had been no rain in the land.

The history of Elijah begins somewhat abruptly. Usually, when a prophet enters, we have some account of his parentage, are told whose son he was and of what tribe; but Elijah drops (so to speak) out of the clouds, as if, like Melchisedek, he were without father, without mother, and without descent, which made some of the Jews fancy that he was an angel sent from heaven; but the apostle has assured us that *he was a man subject to like passions as we are* (James v. 17), which perhaps intimates, not only that he was liable to the common infirmities of human nature, but that, by his natural temper, he was a man of strong passions, more hot and eager than most men, and therefore the more fit to deal with the daring sinners of the age he lived in: so wonderfully does God suit men to the work he designs them for. Rough spirits are called to rough services. The reformation needed such a man as Luther to break the ice. Observe, 1. The prophet's name: *Elijah*—"My God Jehovah is he" (so it signifies), "is he who sends me and will own me and bear me out, is he to whom I would bring Israel back and who alone can effect that great work." 2. His country: He was of the inhabitants of Gilead, on the other side Jordan, either of the tribe of Gad or the half of Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them; but whether a native of either of those tribes is uncertain. The obscurity of his parentage was no prejudice to his eminency afterwards. We need not enquire whence men are, but what they are: if it be a good thing, no matter though it come out of Nazareth. Israel was sorely wounded when God sent them this balm from Gilead and this physician thence. He is called a *Tishbite* from Thisbe, a town in that country. Two things we have an account of here in the beginning of his story:—

I. How he foretold a famine, a long and grievous famine, with which Israel should be punished for their sins. That fruitful land, for want of rain, should be turned into barrenness, for the iniquity of those that dwelt therein. He went and told Ahab this; did not whisper it to the people, to make them disaffected to the government, but proclaimed it to the king, in whose power it was to reform the land, and so to prevent the judgment. It is probable that he reproved Ahab for his idolatry and other wickedness, and told him that unless he repented and reformed this judgment would be brought upon his land. There should be *neither dew nor rain for some years*, none but according to my word, that is, "Expect none till you hear from me again." The apostle teaches us to understand this, not only of the word of prophecy, but the word of prayer, which turned the key of the clouds, James v. 17, 18. He prayed earnestly (in a holy indignation at

Israel's apostasy, and a holy zeal for the glory of God, whose judgments were defied) that it might not rain; and, according to his prayers, the heavens became as brass, till he prayed again that it might rain. In allusion to this story it is said of God's witnesses (Rev. xi. 6), *These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy.* Elijah lets Ahab know, 1. That the Lord Jehovah is the God of Israel, whom he had forsaken. 2. That he is a living God, and not like the gods he worshipped, which were dead dumb idols. 3. That he himself was God's servant in office, and a messenger sent from him: "It is he before whom I stand, to minister to him," or "whom I now represent, in whose stead I stand, and in whose name I speak, in defiance of the prophets of Baal and the groves." 4. That, notwithstanding the present peace and prosperity of the kingdom of Israel, God was displeased with them for their idolatry and would chastise them for it by the want of rain (which, when he withheld it, it was not in the power of the gods they served to bestow; for *are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain?* Jer. xiv. 22), which would effectually prove their impotency, and the folly of those who left the living God, to make their court to such as could do neither good nor evil; and this he confirms with a solemn oath—"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, that Ahab might stand the more in awe of the threatening, the divine life being engaged for the accomplishment of it. 5. He lets Ahab know what interest he had in heaven: It shall be according to my word. With what dignity does he speak when he speaks in God's name, as one who well understood that commission of a prophet (Jer. i. 10), *I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms.* See the power of prayer and the truth of God's word; for he performeth the counsel of his messengers.

II. How he was himself taken care of in that famine. 1. How he was hidden. God bade him go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, v. 3. This was intended, not so much for his preservation, for it does not appear that Ahab immediately sought his life, but as a judgment to the people, to whom, if he had publicly appeared, he might have been a blessing both by his instructions and his intercession, and so have shortened the days of their calamity; but God had determined it should last three years and a half, and therefore, so long, appointed Elijah to abscond, that he might not be solicited to revoke the sentence, the execution of which he had said should be according to his word. When God speaks concerning a nation, to pluck up and destroy, he finds some way or other to remove those that would stand in the gap to turn away his wrath. It bodes ill to a people when good men and good ministers are ordered to hide themselves. When God intended to send rain upon the earth

then he bade Elijah go and *show himself to Ahab, ch. xviii. 1.* For the present, in obedience to the divine command, he went and dwelt all alone in some obscure unfrequented place, where he was not discovered, probably among the reeds of the brook. If Providence calls us to solitude and retirement, it becomes us to acquiesce; when we cannot be useful we must be patient, and when we cannot work for God we must sit still quietly for him. 2. How he was fed. Though he could not work there, having nothing to do but to meditate and pray (which would help to prepare him for his usefulness afterwards), yet he shall eat, for he is in the way of his duty, and *verily he shall be fed, in the day of famine he shall be satisfied.* When the woman, the church, is *driven into the wilderness*, care is taken that she be fed and nourished there, time, times, and half a time, that is, three years and a half, which was just the time of Elijah's concealment. See Rev. xii. 6, 14. Elijah must drink of the brook, and the ravens were appointed to *bring him meat* (v. 4) and did so, v. 6. Here, (1.) The provision was plentiful, and good, and constant, bread and flesh twice a day, daily bread and food convenient. We may suppose that he fared not so sumptuously as the prophets of the groves, who *did eat at Jezebel's table* (ch. xviii. 19), and yet better than the rest of the Lord's prophets, whom Obadiah fed with bread and water, ch. xviii. 4. It ill becomes God's servants, especially his servants the prophets, to be nice and curious about their food and to affect dainties and varieties; if nature be sustained, no matter though the palate be not pleased; instead of envying those who have daintier fare, we should think how many there are, better than we, who live comfortably upon coarser fare and would be glad of our leavings. Elijah had but one meal brought him at a time, every morning and every evening, to teach him not to take thought for the morrow. Let those who have but from hand to mouth learn to live upon Providence, and trust it for *the bread of the day in the day*; thank God for bread this day, and let to-morrow bring bread with it. (2.) The caterers were very unlikely; the *ravens* brought it to him. Obadiah, and others in Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal, would gladly have entertained Elijah; but he was a man by himself, and must be fed in an extraordinary way. He was a figure of John the baptist, whose meat was locusts and wild honey. God could have sent angels to minister to him, as he did afterwards (ch. xix. 5) and as he did to our Saviour (Matt. iv. 11), but he chose to send by winged messengers of another nature, to show that when he pleases he can serve his own purposes by the meanest creatures as effectually as by the mightiest. If it be asked whence the ravens had this provision, how and where it was cooked, and whether they came honestly by it, we must answer, as

Jacob did (Gen. xxvii. 20), *The Lord our God brought it to them*, whose the earth is and the fulness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein. But why ravens? [1.] They are birds of prey, ravenous devouring creatures, more likely to have taken his meat from him, or to have picked out his eyes (Prov. xxx. 17); but thus Samson's riddle is again unriddled, *Out of the eater comes forth meat.* [2.] They are unclean creatures *Every raven after his kind* was, by the law, forbidden to be eaten (Lev. xi. 15), yet Elijah did not think the meat they brought ever the worse for that, but ate and gave thanks, asking no question for conscience' sake. Noah's dove was to him a more faithful messenger than his raven; yet here the ravens are faithful and constant to Elijah. [3.] Ravens feed on insects and carrion themselves, yet they brought the prophet man's meat and wholesome food. It is a pity that those who bring the bread of life to others should themselves take up with *that which is not bread.* [4.] Ravens could bring but a little, and broken meat, yet Elijah was content with such things as he had, and thankful that he was fed, though not feasted. [5.] Ravens neglect their own young ones, and do not feed them; yet when God pleases they shall feed his prophet. Young lions and young ravens may lack, and suffer hunger, but not those that fear the Lord, Ps. xxxiv. 10 [6.] Ravens are themselves fed by special providence (Job xxxviii. 41; Ps. cxlvii. 9), and now they fed the prophet. Have we experienced God's special goodness to us and ours? Let us reckon ourselves obliged thereby to be kind to those that are his, for his sake. Let us learn hence, *First*, To acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over all the creatures; he can make what use he pleases of them, either for judgment or mercy. *Secondly*, To encourage ourselves in God in the greatest straits, and never to distrust him. He that could furnish a table in the wilderness, and make ravens purveyors, cooks, and servitors to his prophet, is able to supply all our need according to his riches in glory.

Thus does Elijah, for a great while, *eat his morsels alone*, and his provision of water, which he has in an ordinary way from the brook, fails him before that which he has by miracle. The powers of nature are limited, but not the powers of the God of nature. Elijah's brook dried up (v. 7) *because there was no rain.* If the heavens fail, earth fails of course; such are all our creature-comforts; we lose them when we most need them, like the brooks in summer, Job vi. 15. But there is a *river which makes glad the city of God* and which never runs dry (Ps. xlvi. 4), *a well of water that springs up to eternal life.* Lord, give us that living water!

8 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 9 Arise, get thee

to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. 11 And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. 12 And she said, *As the LORD thy God liveth*, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. 13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. 14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. 15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. 16 *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

We have here an account of the further protection Elijah was taken under, and the further provision made for him in his retirement. *At destruction and famine he shall laugh* that has God for his friend to guard and maintain him. The brook Cherith is dried up, but God's care of his people, and kindness to them, never slacken, never fail, but are still the same, are still continued and drawn out to those that know him, Ps. xxxvi. 10. When the brook was dried up Jordan was not; why did not God send him thither? Surely because he would show that he has a variety of ways to provide for his people and is not tied to any one. God will now provide for him where he shall have some company and opportunity of usefulness, and not be, as he had been, buried alive. Observe,

I. The place he is sent to, to *Zarephath*, or *Sarepta*, a city of Sidon, out of the bor-

ders of the land of Israel, v. 9. Our Saviour takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favour of God designed for the poor Gentiles, in the fulness of time, Luke iv. 25, 26. *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias*, and some, it is likely, that would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes (says Dr. Lightfoot) *the first prophet of the Gentiles*. Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations and become worse than they; justly therefore is *the casting off of them the riches of the world*. Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen; therefore, lo, he turns to the Gentiles, as the apostles were afterwards ordered to do, Acts xviii. 6. But why to a city of Sidon? Perhaps because the worship of Baal, which was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately thence with Jezebel, who was a Sidonian (ch. xvi. 31); therefore thither he shall go, that thence may be fetched the destroyer of that idolatry. "Even out of Sidon have I called my prophet, my reformer." Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country. Christ never went among the Gentiles except once *into the coast of Sidon*, Matt. xv. 21.

II. The person that is appointed to entertain him, not one of the rich merchants or great men, of Sidon, not such a one as Obadiah, that was governor of Ahab's house and fed the prophets; but a poor widow woman, destitute and desolate, is commanded (that is, is made both able and willing) to sustain him. It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of the *weak and foolish things of the world* and put honour upon them. He is, in a special manner, the widows' God, and feeds them, and therefore they must study what they shall render to him.

III. The provision made for him there. Providence brought the widow woman to meet him very opportunely at the gate of the city (v. 10), and, by what is here related of what passed between Elijah and her, we find,

1. Her case and character; and it appears, (1.) That she was very poor and necessitous. She had nothing to live upon but a handful of meal and a little oil, needy at the best, and now, by the general scarcity, reduced to the last extremity. When she has eaten the little she has, for aught she yet sees, she must die for want, she and her son, v. 12. She had no fuel but the sticks she gathered in the streets, and, having no servant, she must gather them herself (v. 10), being thus more in a condition to receive alms than give entertainment. To her Elijah was sent, that he might still live upon Providence as much as he did when the ravens fed him. It was in compassion to the low estate of his handmaiden that God sent the prophet to her, not to beg of her, but to board with her, and

he would pay well for his table. (2.) That she was very humble and industrious. He found her gathering sticks, and preparing to bake her own bread, *v.* 10, 12. Her mind was brought to her condition, and she complained not of the hardship she was brought to, nor quarrelled with the divine Providence for withholding rain, but accommodated herself to it as well as she could. Such as are of this temper in a day of trouble are best prepared for honour and relief from God. (3.) That she was very charitable and generous. When this stranger desired her to go and fetch him some water to drink, she readily went, at the first word, *v.* 10, 11. She objected not to the present scarcity of it, nor asked him what he would give her for a draught of water (for now it was worth money), nor hinted that he was a stranger, an Israelite, with whom perhaps the Sidonians cared not for having any dealings, any more than the Samaritans, *John* iv. 9. She did not exense herself on account of her weakness through famine, or the urgency of her own affairs, did not tell him she had something else to do than to go on his errands, but left off gathering the sticks for herself to fetch water for him, which perhaps she did the more willingly, being moved with the gravity of his aspect. We should be ready to do any office of kindness even to strangers; if we have not wherewith to give to the distressed, we must be the more ready to work for them. A cup of cold water, though it cost us no more than the labour of fetching, shall in no wise lose its reward. (4.) That she had a great confidence in the word of God. It was a great trial for her faith and obedience when, having told the prophet how low her stock of meal and oil was and that she had but just enough for herself and her son, he bade her *make a cake for him*, and make his first, and then *prepare for herself and her son*. If we consider, it will appear as great a trial as could be in so small a matter. "Let the children first be served" (might she have said); "charity begins at home. I cannot be expected to give, having but little, and not knowing, when that is gone, where to obtain more." She had much more reason than Nabal to ask, "Shall I take my meat and my oil and give it to one that I know not whence he is?" Elijah, it is true, made mention of the God of Israel (*v.* 14), but what was that to a Sidonian? Or if she had a veneration for the name *Jehovah*, and valued the God of Israel as the true God, yet what assurance had she that this stranger was his prophet or had any warrant to speak in his name? It was easy for a hungry vagrant to impose upon her. But she gets over all these objections, and obeys the precept in dependence upon the promise: *She went and did according to the saying of Elijah, v.* 15. *O woman! great was thy faith; one has not found the like, no, not in Israel: all things considered, it ex-*

ceeded that of the widow who, when she had but two mites, cast them into the treasury. She took the prophet's word, that she should not lose by it, but it should be repaid with interest. Those that can venture upon the promise of God will make no difficulty of exposing and emptying themselves in his service, by giving him his dues out of a little and giving him his part first. Those that deal with God must deal upon trust; seek first his kingdom, and then other things shall be added. By the law, the first-fruits were God's, the tithe was taken out first, and the heave-offering of their dough was first offered, *Num.* xv. 20, 21. But surely the increase of this widow's faith, to such a degree as to enable her thus to deny herself and to depend upon the divine promise, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace as the increase of her oil was in the kingdom of providence. Happy are those who can thus, against hope, believe and obey in hope.

2. The care God took of her guest: *The barrel of meal wasted not, nor did the cruse of oil fail*, but still as they took from them more was added to them by the divine power, *v.* 16. Never did corn or olive so increase in the growing (says bishop Hall) as these did in the using; but the *multiplying of the seed sown* (*2 Cor.* ix. 10) in the common course of providence is an instance of the power and goodness of God not to be overlooked because common. The meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending; for *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*. When God blesses a little, it will go a great way, even beyond expectation; as, on the contrary, though there be abundance, if he blow upon it, it comes to little, *Hag.* i. 9; ii. 16. (1.) This was a maintenance for the prophet. Still miracles shall be his daily bread. Hitherto he had been fed with bread and flesh, now he was fed with bread and oil, which they used as we do butter. *Manna* was both, for the *taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil*, *Num.* xi. 8. This Elijah was thankful for, though he had been used to flesh twice a day and now had none at all. Those that cannot live without flesh, once a day at least, because they have been used to it, could not have boarded contentedly with Elijah, no, not to live upon a miracle. (2.) It was a maintenance for the poor widow and her son, and a recompence to her for entertaining the prophet. There is nothing lost by being kind to God's people and ministers; she that received a prophet had a prophet's reward; she gave him house-room, and he repaid her with food for her household. Christ has promised to those who open their doors to him that he will come in to them, and *sup with them*, and *they with him*, *Rev.* iii. 20. Like Elijah here, he brings to those who bid him welcome, not only his own entertainment, but theirs too. See how the reward answered the service. She generously made one cake for the pro-

phet, and was repaid with many for herself and her son. When Abraham offers his only son to God he is told he shall be the father of multitudes. What is laid out in piety or charity is let out to the best interest, upon the best securities. One poor meal's meat this poor widow gave the prophet, and, in recompence of it, *she and her son did eat many days* (v. 15), above two years, in a time of general scarcity; and to have their food from God's special favour, and to eat it in such good company as Elijah's, made it more than doubly sweet. It is promised to those that trust in God that they *shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied*, Ps. xxxvii. 19.

17 And it came to pass after these things, *that* the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. 18 And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? 19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. 20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? 21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. 22 And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. 24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou *art* a man of God, *and* that the word of the LORD in thy mouth *is* truth.

We have here a further recompence made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet; as if it were a small thing to be kept alive, her son, when dead, is restored to life, and so restored to her. Observe,

I The sickness and death of the child. For aught that appears he was her only son, the comfort of her widowed estate. He was fed miraculously, and yet that did not secure

him from sickness and death. *Your fathers did eat manna, and are dead, but there is bread of which a man may eat and not die*, which was given for the life of the world, John vi. 49, 50. The affliction was to this widow as a thorn in the flesh, lest she should be lifted up above measure with the favours that were done her and the honours that were put upon her. 1. She was nurse to a great prophet, was employed to sustain him, and had strong reason to think the Lord would do her good; yet now she loses her child. Note, We must not think it strange if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. 2. She was herself nursed by miracle, and kept a good house without charge or care, by a distinguishing blessing from heaven; and in the midst of all this satisfaction she was thus afflicted. Note, When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will towards us, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of Providence. Our mountain never stands so strong but it may be moved, and therefore, in this world, we must always rejoice with trembling.

II. Her pathetic complaint to the prophet of this affliction. It should seem, the child died suddenly, else she would have applied to Elijah, while he was sick, for the cure of him; but being dead, dead in her bosom, she expostulates with the prophet upon it, rather to give vent to her sorrow than in any hope of relief, v. 18. 1. She expresses herself passionately: *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* How calmly had she spoken of her own and her child's death when she expected to die for want (v. 12)—*that we may eat, and die!* Yet now that her child dies, and not so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed at it. We may speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it *toucheth us we are troubled*, Job iv. 5. Then she spoke deliberately, now in haste; the death of her child was now a surprise to her, and it is hard to keep our spirits composed when troubles come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of our peace and prosperity. She calls him *a man of God*, and yet quarrels with him as if he had occasioned the death of her child, and is ready to wish she had never seen him, forgetting past mercies and miracles: "What have I done against thee?" (so some understand it), "Wherein have I offended thee, or been wanting in my duty? *Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.*" 2. Yet she expresses herself penitently: "*Hast thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to my remembrance, as the effect of the affliction?*" Perhaps she knew of Elijah's intercession against Israel, and, being conscious to herself of sin, perhaps her former worshiping of Baal the god of the Sidonians, she apprehends he had made intercession

against her. Note, (1.) When God removes our comforts from us he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job xiii. 26. Our sins are the death of our children. (2.) When God thus remembers our sins against us he designs thereby to make us remember them against ourselves and repent of them.

III. The prophet's address to God upon this occasion. He gave no answer to her expostulation, but brought it to God, and laid the case before him, not knowing what to say to it himself. He took the dead child from the mother's bosom to his own bed, v. 19. Probably he had taken a particular kindness to the child, and found the affliction his own more than by sympathy. He retired to his chamber, and, 1. He humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, v. 20. He sees death striking by commission from God: *Thou hast brought this evil*; for is there any evil of this kind in the city, in the family, and the Lord has not done it? He pleads the greatness of the affliction to the poor mother: "It is *evil upon the widow*; thou art the widow's God, and dost not usually bring evil upon widows; it is affliction added to the afflicted." He pleads his own concern: "It is the widow *with whom I sojourn*; wilt thou, that art my God, bring evil upon one of the best of my benefactors? I shall be reflected upon, and others will be afraid of entertaining me, if I bring death into the house where I come." 2. He earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again, v. 21. We do not read before this of any that were raised to life; yet Elijah, by a divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, which yet will not warrant us to do the like. David expected not, by fasting and prayer, to bring his child back to life (2 Sam. xii. 23), but Elijah had a power to work miracles, which David had not. He *stretched himself upon the child*, to affect himself with the case and to show how much he was affected with it and how desirous he was of the restoration of the child—he would if he could put life into him by his own breath and warmth; also to give a sign of what God would do by his power, and what he does by his grace, in raising dead souls to a spiritual life; the Holy Ghost comes upon them, overshadows them, and puts life into them. He is very particular in his prayer: *I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again*, which plainly supposes the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, and consequently its immortality, which Grotius thinks God designed by this miracle to give intimation and evidence of, for the encouragement of his suffering people.

IV. The resurrection of the child, and the great satisfaction it gave to the mother: the child revived, v. 22. See the power of prayer and the power of him that hears prayer, who *kills and makes alive*. Elijah brought him to his mother, who, we may suppose, could

scarcely believe her own eyes, and therefore Elijah assures her it is her own: "It is *thy son that liveth*; see it is thy own, and not another," v. 23. The good woman hereupon cries out, *Now I know that thou art a man of God*; though she knew it before, by the increase of her meal, yet the death of her child she took so unkindly that she began to question it (a good man surely would not serve her so); but now she was abundantly satisfied that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God, and will never doubt of it again, but give up herself to the direction of his word and the worship of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child (like that of Lazarus, John xi. 4) was for the glory of God and the honour of his prophet.

#### CHAP. XVIII.

We left the prophet Elijah wrapt up in obscurity. It does not appear that either the increase of the provision or the raising of the child had caused him to be taken notice of at Zarephath, for then Ahab would have discovered him; he would rather do good than be known to do it. But in this chapter his appearance was as public as before his retirement was close; the days appointed for his concealment (which was part of the judgment upon Israel) being finished, he is now commanded to show himself to Ahab, and to expect rain upon the earth, ver. 1. Pursuant to this order we have here, 1. His interview with Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants, by whom he sends notice to Ahab of his coming, ver. 2-16. 2. His interview with Ahab himself, ver. 17-20. 3. His interview with all Israel upon Mount Carmel, in order to a public trial of titles between the Lord and Baal; a most distinguished solemnity it was, in which, 1. Baal and his prophets were confounded. 2. God and Elijah were honoured, ver. 21-39. 4. The execution he did upon the prophets of Baal, ver. 40. 5. The return of the mercy of rain, at the word of Elijah, ver. 41-46. It is a chapter in which are many things very observable.

AND it came to pass *after* many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. 2 And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. And *there was* a sore famine in Samaria. 3 And Ahab called Obadiah, which *was* the governor of *his* house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: 4 For it was *so*, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) 5 And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. 6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. 7 And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* 8



And he answered him, *I am* : go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here.* 9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? 10 *As the LORD thy God liveth*, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, *He is not there*; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. 11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here.* 12 And it shall come to pass, *as soon as I am gone from thee*, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. 13 Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? 14 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here*: and he shall slay me. 15 And Elijah said, *As the LORD of hosts liveth*, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him to day. 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

In these verses we find,

1. The sad state of Israel at this time, upon two accounts:—

1. *Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord* (v. 4), *slew them*, v. 13. Being an idolater, she was a persecutor, and made Ahab one. Even in those bad times, when the calves were worshipped and the temple at Jerusalem deserted, yet there were some good people that feared God and served him, and some good prophets that instructed them in the knowledge of him and assisted them in their devotions. The priests and the Levites had all gone to Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chron. xi. 13, 14), but, instead of them, God raised up these prophets, who read and expounded the law in private meetings, or in the families that retained their integrity, for we read not of any synagogues at this time; they had not the spirit of prophecy as Elijah, nor did they offer sacrifice, or burn incense, but taught people to live well, and keep close to the God of Israel. These Jezebel aimed to extirpate, and put many of them to death, which was as much a public calamity as a

public iniquity, and threatened the utter ruin of religion's poor remains in Israel. Those few that escaped the sword were forced to abscond, and hide themselves in caves, where they were buried alive and cut off, though not from life, yet from usefulness, which is the end and comfort of life; and, when the prophets were persecuted and driven into corners, no doubt their friends, those few good people that were in the land, were treated in like manner. Yet, bad as things were,

(1.) There was one very good man, who was a great man at court, *Obadiah*, who answered his name—a *servant of the Lord*, one who feared God and was faithful to him, and yet was steward of the household to Ahab. Observe his character: He *feared the Lord greatly* (v. 3), was not only a good man, but zealously and eminently good; his great place put a lustre upon his goodness, and gave him great opportunities of doing good; and he *feared the Lord from his youth* (v. 12), he began betimes to be religious and had continued long. Note, Early piety, it is to be hoped, will be eminent piety; those that are good betimes are likely to be very good; he that feared God from his youth came to fear him greatly. He that will thrive must rise betimes. But it is strange to find such an eminently good man governor of Ahab's house, an office of great honour, power, and trust. [1.] It was strange that so wicked a man as Ahab would prefer him to it and continue him in it; certainly it was because he was a man of celebrated honesty, industry, and ingenuity, and one in whom he could repose a confidence, whose eyes he could trust as much as his own, as appears here, v. 5. Joseph and Daniel were preferred because there were none so fit as they for the places they were preferred to. Note, Those who profess religion should study to recommend themselves to the esteem even of those that are without by their integrity, fidelity, and application to business. [2.] It was strange that so good a man as Obadiah would accept of preferment in a court so addicted to idolatry and all manner of wickedness. We may be sure it was not made necessary to qualify him for preferment that he should be of the king's religion, that he should conform to the *statutes of Omri*, or *the law of the house of Ahab*. Obadiah would not have accepted the place if he could not have had it without bowing the knee to Baal, nor was Ahab so impolitic as to exclude those from offices that were fit to serve him, merely because they would not join with him in his devotions. That man that is true to his God will be faithful to his prince. Obadiah therefore could with a good conscience enjoy the place, and therefore would not decline it, nor give it up, though he foresaw he could not do the good he desired to do in it. Those that fear God need not go out of the world, bad as it is. [3.] It was strange that either he did not reform

Ahab or Ahab corrupt him; but it seems they were both fixed; he that was filthy would be filthy still, and he that was holy would be holy still. Those fear God greatly that keep up the fear of him in bad times and places; thus Obadiah did. God has his remnant among all sorts, high and low; there were saints in Nero's household, and in Ahab's.

(2.) This great good man used his power for the protection of God's prophets. He hid 100 of them in two caves, when the persecution was hot, and *fed them with bread and water*, v. 4. He did not think it enough to fear God himself, but, having wealth and power wherewith to do it, he thought himself obliged to assist and countenance others that feared God; nor did he think his being kind to them would excuse him from being good himself, but he did both, he both feared God greatly himself and patronised those that feared him likewise. See how wonderfully God raises up friends for his ministers and people, for their shelter in difficult times, even where one would least expect them. Bread and water were now scarce commodities, yet Obadiah will find a competence of both for God's prophets, to keep them alive for service hereafter, though now they were laid aside.

2. When Jezebel cut off God's prophets God cut off the necessary provisions by the extremity of the drought. Perhaps Jezebel persecuted God's prophets under pretence that they were the cause of the judgment, because Elijah had foretold it. *Christians as lions—Away with Christians to the lions.* But God made them know the contrary, for the famine continued till Baal's prophets were sacrificed, and so great a scarcity of water there was that the king himself and Obadiah went in person throughout the land to seek for grass for the cattle, v. 5, 6. Providence ordered it so, that Ahab might, with his own eyes, see how bad the consequences of this judgment were, that so he might be the better inclined to hearken to Elijah, who would direct him into the only way to put an end to it. Ahab's care was not to *lose all the beasts*, many being already lost; but he took no care about his soul, not to lose that; he took a deal of pains to seek grass, but none to seek the favour of God, fencing against the effect, but not enquiring how to remove the cause. The land of Judah lay close to the land of Israel, yet we find no complaint there of the want of rain; for *Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the saints and prophets* (Hos. xi. 12), by which distinction Israel might plainly have seen the ground of God's controversy, when God caused it to *rain upon one city and not upon another* (Amos iv. 7, 8); but they blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and would not see.

II. The steps taken towards redressing the grievance, by Elijah's appearing again upon the stage, to act as a *Tishbite*, a con-

verter or reformer of Israel, for so (some think) that title of his signifies. Turn them again to the Lord God of hosts, from whom they have revolted, and all will be well quickly; this must be Elijah's doing. See Luke i. 16, 17.

1. Ahab had made diligent search for him (v. 10), had offered rewards to any one that would discover him, sent spies *into every tribe and lordship* of his own dominions, as some understand it, or, as others, into all the neighbouring nations and kingdoms that were in alliance with him; and, when they denied that they knew any thing of him, he would not believe them unless they swore it, and, as should seem, promised likewise upon oath that, if ever they found him among them, they would discover him and deliver him up. It should seem, he made this diligent search for him, not so much that he might punish him for what he had done in denouncing the judgment as that he might oblige him to undo it again, by recalling the sentence, because he had said it should be *according to his word*, having such an opinion of him as men foolishly conceive of witches (that, if they can but compel them to bless that which they have bewitched, it will be well again), or such as the king of Moab had of Balaam. I incline to this because we find, when they came together, Elijah, knowing what Ahab wanted him for, appointed him to meet him on Mount Carmel, and Ahab complied with the appointment, though Elijah took such a way to revoke the sentence and bless the land as perhaps he little thought of.

2. God, at length, ordered Elijah to present himself to Ahab, because the time had now come when he would *send ruin upon the earth* (v. 1), or rather *upon the land*. Above two years he had lain hid with the widow at Zarephath, after he had been concealed one year by the brook Cherith; so that the third year of his sojourning there, here spoken of (v. 1), was the fourth of the famine, which lasted in all three years and six months, as we find, Luke iv. 25; James v. 17. Such was Elijah's zeal, no doubt, against the idolatry of Baal, and such his compassion to his people, that he thought it long to be thus confined to a corner; yet he appeared not till God bade him: "*Go and show thyself to Ahab, for now thy hour has come, even the time to favour Israel.*" Note, It bodes well to any people when God calls his ministers out of their corners, and bids them show themselves—assign that he will *give ruin on the earth*; at least we may the better be content with the bread of affliction while *our eyes see our teachers*, Isa. xxx. 20, 21.

3. Elijah first surrendered, or rather discovered, himself to Obadiah. He knew, by the Spirit, where to meet him, and we are here told what passed between them.

(1.) Obadiah saluted him with great respect, fell on his face, and humbly asked, *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* v. 7. As he

had shown the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he showed the reverence of a son to this father of the prophets; and by this made it appear that he did indeed *fear God greatly*, that he did honour to one that was his extraordinary ambassador and had a great interest in heaven.

(2.) Elijah, in answer to him, [1.] Transfers the title of honour he gave him to Ahab: "Call him thy lord, not me;" that is a fitter title for a prince than for a prophet, *who seeks not honour from men*. Prophets should be called *seers*, and *shepherds*, and *watchmen*, and *ministers*, rather than *lords*, as those that mind duty more than dominion. [2.] He bids Obadiah go and tell the king that he is there to speak with him: *Tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is forth-coming*, v. 8. He would have the king know before, that it might not be a surprise to him and that he might be sure it was the prophet's own act to present himself to him.

(3.) Obadiah begs to be excused from carrying this message to Ahab, for it might prove as much as his life was worth. [1.] He tells Elijah what great search Ahab had made for him and how much his heart was upon it to find him out, v. 10. [2.] He takes it for granted that Elijah would again withdraw (v. 12): *The Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee* (as it is likely he had done sometimes, when Ahab thought he had been sure of him) *whither I know not*. See 2 Kings ii. 16. He thought Elijah was not in good earnest when he bade him tell Ahab where he was, but intended only to expose the impotency of his malice; for he knew Ahab was not worthy to receive any kindness from the prophet and it was not fit that the prophet should receive any mischief from him. [3.] He is sure Ahab would be so enraged at the disappointment that he would put him to death for making a fool of him, or for not laying hands on Elijah himself, when he had him in his reach, v. 12. Tyrants and persecutors, in their passion, are often unreasonably outrageous, even towards their friends and confidants. [4.] He pleads that he did not deserve to be thus exposed, and put in peril of his life: *What have I said amiss?* v. 9. *Nay* (v. 13), *Was it not told my lord how I hid the prophets?* He mentions this, not in pride or ostentation, but to convince Elijah that though he was Ahab's servant he was not in his interest, and therefore deserved not to be bantered as one of the tools of his persecution. He that had protected so many prophets, he hoped, should not have his own life hazarded by so great a prophet.

(4.) Elijah satisfied him that he might with safety deliver this message to Ahab, by assuring him, with an oath, that he would, this very day, present himself to Ahab, v. 15. Let but Obadiah know that he spoke seriously and really intended it, and he will make no scruple to carry the message to Ahab. Elijah swears by *the Lord of hosts*, who has all

power in his hands, and is therefore able to protect his servants against all the powers of hell and earth.

(5.) Notice is hereby soon brought to Ahab that Elijah had sent him a challenge to meet him immediately at such a place, and Ahab accepts the challenge: *He went to meet Elijah*, v. 16. We may suppose it was a great surprise to Ahab to hear that Elijah, whom he had so long sought and not found, was now found without seeking. He went in quest of grass, and found him from whose word, at God's mouth, he must expect rain. Yet his guilty conscience gave him little reason to hope for it, but, rather, to fear some other more dreadful judgment. Had he, by his spies, surprised Elijah, he would have triumphed over him; but, now that he was thus surprised by him, we may suppose he even trembled to look him in the face, hated him, and yet feared him, as Herod did John.

17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* 18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim. 19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. 20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

We have here the meeting between Ahab and Elijah, as had a king as ever the world was plagued with and as good a prophet as ever the church was blessed with. 1. Ahab, like himself, basely accused Elijah. He durst not strike him, remembering that Jeroboam's hand withered when it was stretched out against a prophet, but gave him bad language, which was no less an affront to him that sent him. It was a very coarse compliment with which he accosted him at the first word: *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* v. 17. How unlike was this to that with which his servant Obadiah saluted him (v. 7): *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* Obadiah feared God greatly; Ahab had sold himself to work wickedness; and both discovered their character by the manner of their address to the prophet. One may guess how people stand affected to God by observing how they stand affected to his people and ministers. Elijah now came to bring blessings to Israel, tidings of the return of the rain; yet he was thus affronted. Had it been true that he was the *troubler of Israel*, Ahab, as king, would have

been bound to animadvert upon him. There are those who trouble Israel by their wickedness, whom the conservators of the public peace are concerned to enquire after. But it was utterly false concerning Elijah; so far was he from being an enemy to Israel's welfare that he was the stay of it, *the chariots and horsemen of Israel*. Note, It has been the lot of the best and most useful men to be called and counted *the troublers of the land*, and to be run down as public grievances. Even Christ and his apostles were thus misrepresented, Acts xvii. 6. 2. Elijah, like himself, boldly returned the charge upon the king, and proved it upon him, that he was *the troubler of Israel*, v. 18. Eljah is not the Achan: "*I have not troubled Israel, have neither done them any wrong nor designed them any hurt.*" Those that procure God's judgments do the mischief, not he that merely foretels them and gives warning of them, that the nation may repent and prevent them. *I would have healed Israel, but they would not be healed.* Ahab is the Achan, the troubler, who follows Baalim, those accursed things. Nothing creates more trouble to a land than the impiety and profaneness of princes and their families. 3. As one having authority immediately from the King of kings, he ordered a convention of the states to be forthwith summoned to meet at Mount Carmel, where there had been an altar built to God, v. 30. Probably on that mountain they had an eminent high place, where formerly the pure worship of God had been kept up as well as it could be any where but at Jerusalem. Thither all Israel must come, to give Elijah the meeting; and the prophets of Baal who were dispersed all the country over, with those of the groves who were Jezebel's domestic chaplains, must there make their personal appearance. 4. Ahab issued out writs accordingly, for the convening of this great assembly (v. 20), either because he feared Elijah and durst not oppose him (Saul stood in awe of Samuel more than of God), or because he hoped Elijah would bless the land, and speak the word that they might have rain, and upon those terms they would be all at his beck. Those that slighted and hated his counsels would gladly be beholden to him for his prayers. Now God made those who said they were Jews and were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan, to come, and, in effect, to worship at his feet, and to know that God had loved him, Rev. iii. 9.

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. 22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but

Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. 23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: 24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. 25 And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. 26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. 27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. 28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. 29 And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. 30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: 32 And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order

and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid *him* on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. 34 And he said, Do *it* the second time. And they did *it* the second time. And he said, Do *it* the third time. And they did *it* the third time. 35 And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. 36 And it came to pass at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and that I *am* thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. 37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God. 40 And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

Ahab and the people expected that Elijah would, in this solemn assembly, *bless the land*, and pray for rain; but he had other work to do first. The people must be brought to repent and reform, and then they may look for the removal of the judgment, but not till then. This is the right method. God will first *prepare our heart*, and then *cause his ear to hear*, will first *turn us to him*, and then *turn to us*, Ps. x. 17; lxxx. 3. Deserters must not look for God's favour till they return to their allegiance. Elijah might have looked for rain seventy times seven times, and not have seen it, if he had not thus begun his work at the right end. Three years and a half's famine would not bring them back to God. Elijah would endeavour to convince their judgments, and no doubt it was by special warrant and direction from heaven that he put the controversy between God and Baal upon a public trial. It was great condescension in God that he would suffer so plain a case to be disputed, and would permit Baal

to be a competitor with him; but thus God would have every mouth to be stopped and all flesh to become silent before him. God's cause is so incontestably just that it needs not fear to have the evidences of its equity searched into and weighed.

1. Elijah reproved the people for mixing the worship of God and the worship of Baal together. Not only some Israelites worshipped God and others Baal, but the same Israelites sometimes worshipped one and sometimes the other. This he calls (*v. 21*) *halting between two opinions, or thoughts*. They worshipped God to please the prophets, but worshipped Baal to please Jezebel and curry favour at court. They thought to trim the matter, and play on both sides, as the Samaritans, 2 Kings xvii. 33. Now Elijah shows them the absurdity of this. He does not insist upon their relation to Jehovah—“Is he not yours, and the God of your fathers, while Baal is the god of the Sidonians? And will a nation change their god?” Jer. ii. 11. No, he waives the prescription, and enters upon the merits of the cause:—“There can be but one God, but one infinite and but one supreme: there needs but one God, one omnipotent, one all-sufficient. What occasion for addition to that which is perfect? Now if, upon trial, it appears that Baal is that one infinite omnipotent Being, that one supreme Lord and all-sufficient benefactor, you ought to renounce Jehovah and cleave to Baal only: but, if Jehovah be that one God, Baal is a cheat, and you must have no more to do with him.” Note, 1. It is a very bad thing to *halt between God and Baal*. “In reconcilable differences (says bishop Hall) nothing more safe than indifference both of practice and opinion; but, in cases of such necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, *he that is not with God is against him*.” Compare Mark ix. 38, 39, with Matt. xii. 30. The service of God and the service of sin, the dominion of Christ and the dominion of our lusts, these are the two thoughts which it is dangerous halting between. Those halt between them that are unresolved under their convictions, unstable and unsteady in their purposes, promise fair, but do not perform, begin well, but do not hold on, that are inconsistent with themselves, or indifferent and lukewarm in that which is good. *Their heart is divided* (Hos. x. 2), whereas God will have all or none. 2. We are fairly put to our choice *whom we will serve*, Josh. xxiv. 15. If we can find one that has more right to us, or will be a better master to us, than God, we may take him at our peril. God demands no more from us than he can make out a title to. To this fair proposal of the case, which Elijah here makes, the people knew not what to say: *They answered him not a word*. They could say nothing to justify themselves, and they would say nothing to condemn themselves, but, as people confounded, let him say what he would.

II. He proposed to bring the matter to a fair trial; and it was so much the fairer because Baal had all the external advantages on his side. The king and court were all for Baal; so was the body of the people. The managers of Baal's cause were 450 men, fat and well fed (v. 22), besides 400 more, their supporters or seconds, v. 19. The manager of God's cause was but one man, lately a poor exile, hardly kept from starving; so that God's cause has nothing to support it but its own right. However, it is put to this experiment, "Let each side prepare a sacrifice, and pray to its God, and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God; if neither shall thus answer, let the people turn Atheists; if both, let them continue to *halt between two*." Elijah, doubtless, had a special commission from God to put it to this test, otherwise he would have tempted God and affronted religion; but the case was extraordinary, and the judgment upon it would be of use, not only then, but in all ages. It is an instance of the courage of Elijah that he durst stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers; and the issue encourages all God's witnesses and advocates never to fear the face of man. Elijah does not say, "The God that answers by water" (though that was the thing the country needed), but "that answers by fire, let him be God;" because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy. The God therefore that has power to pardon sin, and to signify it by consuming the sin-offering, must needs be the God that can relieve us against the calamity. He that can give fire can give rain; see Matt. ix. 2, 6.

III. The people join issue with him: *It is well spoken*, v. 24. They allow the proposal to be fair and unexceptionable. "God has often answered by fire; if Baal cannot do so, let him be cast out for a usurper." They were very desirous to see the experiment tried, and seemed resolved to abide by the issue, whatever it should be. Those that were firm for God doubted not but it would end to his honour; those that were indifferent were willing to be determined; and Ahab and the prophets of Baal durst not oppose for fear of the people, and hoped that either they could obtain fire from heaven (though they never had yet), and the rather because, as some think, they worshipped the sun in Baal, or that *Elijah* could not, because not at the temple, where God was wont thus to manifest his glory. If, in this trial, they could but bring it to a drawn battle, their other advantages would give them the victory. Let it go on therefore to a trial.

IV. The prophets of Baal try first, but in vain, with their god. They covet the precedence, not only for the honour of it, but that, if they can but in the least seem to gain their point, Elijah may not be admitted to make the trial. Elijah allows it to them (v.

25), gives them the lead for their greater confusion; only, knowing that the working of Satan is with lying wonders, he takes care to prevent a fraud: Be sure to *put no fire under*. Now in their experiment observe,

1. How importunate and noisy the prophets of Baal were in their applications to him. They got their sacrifices ready; and we may well imagine what a noise 450 men made, when they cried as one man, and with all their might, *O Baal! hear us, O Baal! answer us*; as it is in the margin: and this for some hours together, longer than Diana's worshippers made their cry, *Greet is Diana of the Ephesians*, Acts xix. 34. How senseless, how brutish, were they in their addresses to Baal! (1.) Like fools, they leaped upon the altar, as if they would themselves become sacrifices with their bullock; or thus they expressed their great earnestness of mind. They leaped up and down, or danced about the altar (so some): they hoped, by their dancing, to please their deity, as Herodias did Herod, and so to obtain their request. (2.) Like madmen they cut themselves in pieces with knives and lancets (v. 25) for vexation that they were not answered, or in a sort of prophetic fury, hoping to obtain the favour of their god by offering to him their own blood, when they could not obtain it with the blood of their bullock. God never required his worshippers thus to honour him; but the service of the devil, though in some instances it pleases and pampers the body, yet in other things it is really cruel to it, as in envy and drunkenness. It seems, this was the manner of the worshippers of Baal. God expressly forbade his worshippers to cut themselves, Deut. xiv. 1. He insists upon it that we mortify our lusts and corruptions; but corporeal penances and severities, such as the Papists use, which have no tendency to that, are no pleasure to him. *Who has required these things at your hands?*

2. How sharp Elijah was upon them, v. 27. He stood by them, and patiently heard them for so many hours praying to an idol, yet with secret indignation and disdain; and at noon, when the sun was at the hottest, and they too expecting fire (then if ever), he upbraided them with their folly; and notwithstanding the gravity of his office, and the seriousness of the work he had before him, bantered them: "*Cry aloud, for he is a god, a goodly god that cannot be made to hear without all this clamour. Surely you think he is talking or meditating (as the word is) or he is pursuing some deep thoughts, (in a brown study, as we say), thinking of somewhat else and not minding his own matter, when not your credit only, but all his honour lies at stake, and his interest in Israel. His new conquest will be lost if he do not look about him quickly.*" Note, The worship of idols is a most ridiculous thing, and it is but justice to represent it so and expose it to scorn. This will, by no means, justify those

who ridicule the worshippers of God in Christ because the worship is not performed just in their way. Baal's prophets were so far from being convinced and put to shame by the just reproach Elijah cast upon them that it made them the more violent and led them to act more ridiculously. *A deceived heart had turned them aside, they could not deliver their souls* by saying, *Is there not a lie in our right hand?*

3. How deaf Baal was to them. Elijah did not interrupt them, but let them go on till they were tired, and quite despaired of success, which was not *till the time of the evening sacrifice*, v. 29. During all that time some of them prayed, while others of them prophesied, sang hymns, perhaps to the praise of Baal, or rather encouraged those that were praying to proceed, telling them that Baal would answer them at last; but there was *no answer, nor any that regarded*. Idols could do neither good nor evil. The prince of the power of the air, if God had permitted him, could have caused *fire to come down from heaven* on this occasion, and gladly would have done it for the support of his Baal. We find that the beast which deceives the world does it. *He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men and so deceiveth them*, Rev. xiii. 13, 14. But God would not suffer the devil to do it now, because the trial of his title was put on that issue by consent of parties.

V. Elijah soon obtains from his God an answer by fire. The Baalites are forced to give up their cause, and now it is Elijah's turn to produce his. Let us see if he speed better.

1. He fitted up an altar. He would not make use of theirs, which had been polluted with their prayers to Baal, but, finding the ruins of an altar there, which had formerly been used in the service of the Lord, he chose to repair that (v. 30), to intimate to them that he was not about to introduce any new religion, but to revive the faith and worship of their fathers' God, and reduce them to their first love, their first works. He could not bring them to the altar at Jerusalem unless he could unite the two kingdoms again (which, for correction to both, God designed should not now be done), therefore, by his prophetic authority, he builds an altar on Mount Carmel, and so owns that which had formerly been built there. When we cannot carry a reformation so far as we would we must do what we can, and rather comply with some corruptions than not do our utmost towards the extirpation of Baal. He repaired this altar with *twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes*, v. 31. Though ten of the tribes had revolted to Baal, he would look upon them as belonging to God still, by virtue of the ancient covenant with their fathers: and, though those ten were unhappily divided from the other two in civil interest, yet in the worship of the God of

Israel they had communion with each other, and they twelve were one. Mention is made of God's calling their father Jacob by the name of *Israel, a prince with God* (v. 31), to shame his degenerate seed, who worshipped a god which they saw could not hear nor answer them, and to encourage the prophet who was now to wrestle with God as Jacob did; he also shall be a prince with God. Ps. xxiv. 6, *Thy face, O Jacob!* Hos. xii. 4. *There he spoke with us.*

2. Having built his altar in the name of the Lord (v. 32), by direction from him and with an eye to him, and not for his own honour, he prepared his sacrifice, v. 33. *Behold the bullock and the wood; but where is the fire?* Gen. xxii. 7, 8. *God will provide himself fire.* If we, in sincerity, offer our hearts to God, he will, by his grace, kindle a holy fire in them. Elijah was no priest, nor were his attendants Levites. Carmel had neither tabernacle nor temple; it was a great way distant from the ark of the testimony and the place God had chosen; this was not the altar that sanctified the gift; yet never was any sacrifice more acceptable to God than this. The particular Levitical institutions were so often dispensed with (as in the time of the Judges, Samuel's time, and now) that one would be tempted to think they were more designed for types than to be fulfilled in the evangelical anti-types than for laws to be fulfilled in the strict observance of them. Their perishing thus in the using, as the apostle speaks of them (Col. ii. 22), was to intimate the utter abolition of them after a little while, Heb. viii. 13.

3. He ordered abundance of water to be poured upon his altar, which he had prepared a trench for the reception of (v. 32), and, some think, made the altar hollow. Twelve barrels of water (probably sea-water, for the sea was near, and so much fresh water in this time of drought was too precious for him to be so prodigal of it), thrice four, he poured upon his sacrifice, to prevent the suspicion of any fire under (for, if there had been any, this would have put it out), and to make the expected miracle the more illustrious.

4. He then solemnly addressed himself to God by prayer before his altar, humbly beseeching him to *turn to ashes his burnt-offering* (as the phrase is, Ps. xx. 3), and to testify his acceptance of it. His prayer was not long, for he used no vain repetitions, nor thought he should be *heard for his much speaking*; but it was very grave and composed, and showed his mind to be calm and sedate, and far from the heats and disorders that Baal's prophets were in, v. 36, 37. Though he was not at the place appointed, he chose the appointed time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, thereby to testify his communion with the altar at Jerusalem. Though he expected an answer by fire, yet he came near to the altar with boldness, and

feared not that fire. He addressed himself to God as *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*, acting faith on God's ancient covenant, and reminding people too (for prayer may prevail) of their relation both to God and to the patriarchs. Two things he pleads here:—(1.) The glory of God: "Lord, hear me, and answer me, *that it may be known* (for it is now by the most denied or forgotten) *that thou art God in Israel*, to whom alone the homage and devotion of Israel are due, and *that I am thy servant*, and do all that I have done, am doing, and shall do, as thy agent, *at thy word*, and not to gratify any humour or passion of my own. Thou employest me; Lord, make it appear that thou dost so;" see Num. xvi. 28, 29. Elijah sought not his own glory but in subserviency to God's, and for his own necessary vindication. (2.) The edification of the people: "*That they may know that thou art the Lord*, and may experience thy grace, *turning their heart*, by this miracle, as a means, *back again to thee*, in order to thy return in a way of mercy to them."

5. God immediately answered him by fire, v. 38. Elijah's God was neither talking nor pursuing, needed not to be either awakened or quickened; while he was yet speaking, *the fire of the Lord fell*, and not only, as at other times (Lev. ix. 24; 1 Chron. xxi. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 1) *consumed the sacrifice and the wood*, in token of God's acceptance of the offering, but *licked up all the water in the trench*, exhaling that, and drawing it up as a vapour, in order to the intended rain, which was to be the fruit of this sacrifice and prayer, more than the product of natural causes. Compare Ps. cxxxv. 7. *He causeth vapours to ascend, and maketh lightnings for the rain*; for this rain he did both. As for those who fall as victims to the fire of God's wrath, no water can shelter them from it, any more than briars or thorns, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. But this was not all; to complete the miracle, the fire consumed the *stones of the altar*, and the very *dust*, to show that it was no ordinary fire, and perhaps to intimate that, though God accepted this occasional sacrifice from this altar, yet for the future they ought to demolish all the altars on their high places, and, for their constant sacrifices, make use of that at Jerusalem only. Moses's altar and Solomon's were consecrated by the fire from heaven; but this was destroyed, because no more to be used. We may well imagine what a terror the fire struck on guilty Ahab and all the worshippers of Baal, and how they fled from it as far and as fast as they could, saying, *Lest it consume us also*, alluding to Num. xvi. 34.

VI. What was the result of this fair trial. The prophets of Baal had failed in their proof, and could give no evidence at all to make out their pretensions on behalf of their god, but were perfectly non-suited. Elijah had, by the most convincing and undeniable

evidence, proved his claims on behalf of the God of Israel. And now, 1. The people, as the jury, gave in their verdict upon the trial, and they are all agreed in it; the case is so plain that they need not go from the bar to consider of their verdict or consult about it: *They fell on their faces*, and all, as one man, said, "*Jehovah, he is the God*, and not Baal; we are convinced and satisfied of it: *Jehovah, he is the God*" (v. 39), whence, one would think, they should have inferred, "If he be the God, he shall be our God, and we will serve him only," as Josh. xxiv. 24. Some, we hope, had their hearts thus turned back, but the generality of them were convinced only, not converted, yielded to the truth of God, that he is the God, but consented not to his covenant, that he should be theirs. Blessed are those that have not seen what they saw and yet have believed and been wrought upon by it more than those that saw it. Let it for ever be looked upon as a point adjudged against all pretenders (for it was carried, upon a full hearing, against one of the most daring and threatening competitors that ever the God of Israel was affronted by) that *Jehovah, he is God*, God alone. 2. The prophets of Baal, as criminals, are seized, condemned, and executed, according to law, v. 40. If Jehovah be the true God, Baal is a false God, to whom these Israelites had revolted, and seduced others to the worship of him; and therefore, by the express law of God, they were to be put to death, Deut. xiii. 1—11. There needed no proof of the fact; all Israel were witnesses of it. and therefore Elijah (acting still by an extraordinary commission, which is not to be drawn into a precedent) orders them all to be slain immediately as the troublers of the land, and Ahab himself is so terrified, for the present, with the fire from heaven, that he dares not oppose it. These were the 450 prophets of Baal; the 400 prophets of the groves (who, some think, were Sidonians), though summoned (v. 19), yet, as it should seem, did not attend, and so escaped this execution, which fair escape perhaps Ahab and Jezebel thought themselves happy in; but it proved they were reserved to be the instruments of Ahab's destruction, some time after, by encouraging him to go up to Ramoth-Gilead. ch. xxii. 6.

11 And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for *there is a sound of abundance of rain*. 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, 43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked,



and said, *There is nothing.* And he said, Go again seven times. 44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare *thy chariot*, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. 45 And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Israel being thus far reformed that they had acknowledged the Lord to be God, and had consented to the execution of Baal's prophets, that they might not seduce them any more, though this was far short of a thorough reformation, yet it was so far accepted that God thereupon opened the bottles of heaven, and poured out blessings upon his land, that very evening (as it should seem) on which they did this good work, which should have confirmed them in their reformation; see Hag. ii. 18, 19.

I. Elijah sent Ahab to *eat and drink*, for joy that God had now accepted his works, and that rain was coming; see Eccl. ix. 7. Ahab had continued fasting all day, either religiously, it being a day of prayer, or for want of leisure, it being a day of great expectation; but now let him *eat and drink*, for, though others perceive no sign of it, Elijah, by faith, hears the *sound of abundance of rain*, v. 41. God reveals his secrets to his servants the prophets; and yet, without a revelation, we may foresee that when man's judgments run down like a river God's mercy will. Rain is the river of God, Ps. lxxv. 9.

II. He himself retired to pray (for though God had promised rain, he must ask it, Zech. x. 1), and to give thanks for God's answer by fire, now hoping for an answer by water. What he said we are not told; but, 1. He withdrew to a strange place, to the *top of Carmel*, which was very high and very private. Hence we read of those that *hide themselves in the top of Carmel*, Amos ix. 3. There he would be alone. Those who are called to appear and act in public for God must yet find time to be private with him and keep up their converse with him in solitude. There he set himself, as it were, upon his *watch-tower*, like the prophet, Hab. ii. 1. 2. He put himself into a strange posture. He cast himself down on his knees upon the earth, in token of humility, reverence, and importunity, and *put his face between his knees* (that is, bowed his head so

low that it touched his knees), thus abasing himself in the sense of his own meanness now that God had thus honoured him.

III. He ordered his servant to bring him notice as soon as he discerned a cloud arising out of the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, which he had a large prospect of from the top of Carmel. The sailors at this day call it *Cape Carmel*. Six times his servant goes to the point of the hill and sees nothing, brings no good news to his master; yet Elijah continues praying, will not be diverted so far as to go and see with his own eyes, but still sends his servant to see if he can discover any hopeful cloud, while he keeps his mind close and intent in prayer, and abides by it, as one that has taken up his father Jacob's resolution, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me.* Note, Though the answer of our fervent and believing supplications may not come quickly, yet we must continue instant in prayer, and not faint nor desist; for *at the end it shall speak and not lie.*

IV. A little cloud at length appeared, no bigger than a man's hand, which presently overspread the heavens and watered the earth, v. 44, 45. Great blessings often arise from small beginnings, and showers of plenty from a cloud of a span long. Let us therefore never *despise the day of small things*, but hope and wait for great things from it. This was not as a morning cloud, which passes away (though Israel's goodness was so), but one that produced a plentiful rain (Ps. lxxviii. 9), and an earnest of more.

V. Elijah hereupon hastened Ahab home, and attended him himself. Ahab rode in his chariot, at ease and in state, v. 45. Elijah ran on foot before him. If Ahab had paid the respect to Elijah that he deserved he would have taken him into his chariot, as the eunuch did Philip, that he might honour him before the elders of Israel, and confer with him further about the reformation of the kingdom. But his corruptions got the better of his convictions, and he was glad to get clear of him, as Felix of Paul, when he dismissed him, and adjourned his conference with him to a more convenient season. But, since Ahab invites him not to ride with him, he will *run before him* (v. 46) as one of his footmen, that he may not seem to be lifted up with the great honour God had put upon him or to abate in his civil respect to his prince, though he reproved him faithfully. God's ministers should make it appear that, how great soever they look when they deliver God's messages, yet they are far from affecting worldly grandeur: let them leave that to the kings of the earth.

#### CHAP. XIX.

We left Elijah at the entrance of Jezreel, still appearing publicly, and all the people's eyes upon him. In this chapter we have him again ascending, and driven into obscurity, at a time when he could ill be spared; but we are to look upon it as a punishment to Israel for the insincerity and inconsistency of their reformation. When people will not learn it is just with God to remove their teachers into corners. Now observe, I. How he was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel his sworn enemy, ver. 1-3. II. How he was met, in his banishment, by

the favour of God, his covenant friend. 1. How God fed him, ver. 4-8. 2. How he conversed with him, and manifested himself to him (ver. 9, 11-13), heard his complaint (ver. 10-14), directed him what to do (ver. 13-17), and encouraged him, ver. 18. 11. How his hands were strengthened, at his return out of banishment, by the joining of Elisha with him, ver. 19-21.

**A**ND Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time. 3 And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. 5 And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. 6 And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. 8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

One would have expected, after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God and such a clear decision of the controversy depending between him and Baal, to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people—after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them, the one as it signified the acceptance of their offering, the other as it *refreshed their inheritance, which was weary*—that now they would all, as one man, return to the worship of the God of Israel and take Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he would thenceforward be prime-minister of state, and his directions would be as laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise; he is neglected whom God honoured; no respect is paid to him, no care taken of him, nor any use made of him, but,

on the contrary, the land of Israel, to which he had been, and might have been, so great a blessing, is now made too hot for him. 1. Ahab incensed Jezebel against him. That queen-consort, it seems, was in effect queen-regent, as she was afterwards when she was queen-dowager, an imperious woman that managed king and kingdom and did what she would. Ahab's conscience would not let him persecute Elijah (some remains he had in him of the blood and spirit of an Israelite, which tied his hands), but he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done (r. 1), not to convince, but to exasperate her. It is not said he told her what God had done, but what *Elijah* had done, as if he, by some spell or charm, had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it. Especially he represented to her, as that which would make her outrageous against him, that he had slain the prophets; the prophets of Baal he calls *the prophets*, as if none but they were worthy of the name. His heart was set upon them, and he aggravated the slaying of them as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal upon Jezebel for killing God's prophets, *ch. xviii. 4.* Those who, when they cannot for shame or fear do mischief themselves, yet stir up others to do it, will have it laid to their charge as if they had themselves done it. 2. Jezebel sent him a threatening message (r. 2), that she had vowed and sworn to be the death of him within twenty-four hours. Something prevents her from doing it just now, but she resolves it shall not be long undone. Note, Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God by that which should convince and conquer them and bring them into subjection to him. She swears by her gods, and, raging like one distracted, curseth herself if she slay not him, without any proviso of a divine permission. Cruelty and confidence often meet in persecutors. *I will pursue, I will overtake*, *Exod. xv. 9.* But how came she to send him word of her design, and so to give him an opportunity of making his escape? Did she think him so daring that he would not flee, or herself so formidable that she could prevent him? Or was there a special providence in it, that she should be thus infatuated by her own fury? I am apt to think that though she desired nothing more than his blood, yet, at this time, she durst not meddle with him *for fear of the people, all counting him a prophet*, a great prophet, and therefore sent this message to him merely to frighten him and get him out of the way, for the present, that he might not carry on what he had begun. The backing of her threats with an oath and imprecation does not at all prove that she really intended to slay him, but only that she intended to make him believe so. The gods she swore by could do her no harm. 3. Elijah, hereupon, in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba,

v. 3. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab and all the prophets of Baal? Nay, which kept him by his sacrifice when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman. *Lord, what is man!* Great faith is not always alike strong. He could not but know that he might be very serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all the reason in the world to depend upon God's protection while he was doing God's work; yet he fled. In his former danger God had bidden him hide himself (*ch. xvii. 3*), therefore he supposed he might do so now. 4. From Beer-sheba he went forward into the wilderness, that vast howling wilderness in which the Israelites wandered. Beer-sheba was so far distant from Jezreel, and within the dominion of so good a king as Jehoshaphat, that he could not but be safe there; yet, as if his fears haunted him even when he was out of the reach of danger, he could not rest there, but went a day's journey into the desert. Yet perhaps he retired thither not so much for his safety as that he might be wholly retired from the world, in order to a more free and intimate communion with God. *He left his servant at Beer-sheba* that he might be private in the wilderness, as Abraham left his servants at the bottom of the hill when he went up into the mount to worship God, and as Christ in the garden was *withdrawn from his disciples*, or perhaps it was because he would not expose his servant, who was young and tender, to the hardships of the wilderness, which would have been putting new wine into old bottles. We ought thus to consider the frame of those who are under our charge, for God considers ours. 5. Being wearied with his journey, he grew cross (like children when they are sleepy) and *wished he might die, v. 4.* He *requested for his life* (so it is in the margin), *that he might die*; for death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet that was not the reason why he wished to die; it was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to *depart and be with Christ*, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. Those that are, in this manner, forward to die are not in the fittest frame for dying. Jezebel has sworn his death, and therefore he, in a fret, prays for it, runs from death to death, yet with this difference, he wishes to die by the hand of the Lord, whose tender mercies are great, and not to fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He would rather die in the wilderness than as Baal's prophet died, according to Jezebel's threatening (*v. 2*), lest the worshippers of Baal should triumph and blaspheme the God of Israel, whom they will think themselves too hard for, if they can run down his advocate. He pleads, "It is

enough. I have done enough, and suffered enough. I am weary of living." Those that have secured a happiness in the other world will soon have enough of this world. He pleads, "*I am not better than my fathers*, not better able to bear those fatigues, and therefore why should I be longer burdened with them than they were?" But is this *that my lord Elijah?* Can that great and gallant spirit shrink thus? God thus left him to himself, to show that when he was bold and strong it was *in the Lord and the power of his might*, but of himself he was *no better than his fathers* or brethren. 6. God, by an angel, fed him in that wilderness, into the wants and perils of which he had wilfully thrown himself, and in which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he would have perished. How much better does God deal with his froward children than they deserve! Elijah, in a pet, wished to die; God needed him not, yet he designed further to employ and honour him, and therefore sent an angel to *keep him alive*. Our case would be bad sometimes if God should take us at our word and grant us our foolish passionate requests. Having prayed that he might die, he *laid down and slept* (*v. 5*), wishing it may be to die in his sleep, and not to awake again; but he is awakened out of his sleep, and finds himself not only well provided for with bread and water (*v. 6*), but, which was more, attended by an angel, who guarded him when he slept, and twice called him to his food when it was ready for him, *v. 5, 7*. He needed not to complain of the unkindness of men when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Thus provided for, he had reason to think he had fared better than the *prophets of the groves*, that *died eat at Jezebel's table*. Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not lost them; there they may *look at him that lives and sees them*, as *Hagar*, Gen. xvi. 13. 7. He was carried, in the strength of this meat, to Horeb, *the mount of God, v. 8*. Thither the Spirit of the Lord led him, probably beyond his own intention, that he might have communion with God in the same place where Moses had, the law that was given by Moses being revived by him. The angel bade him eat the second time, because of the greatness of the journey that was *before him, v. 7*. Note. God knows what he designs us for, though we do not, what service, what trials, and will take care for us when we, for want of foresight, cannot for ourselves, that we be furnished for them with *grace sufficient*. He that appoints what the voyage shall be will victual the ship accordingly. See how many different ways God took to keep Elijah alive; he fed him by ravens, with multiplied meals—then by an angel—and now, to show that *man lives not by bread alone*, he kept him

alive forty days without meat, not resting and sleeping, which might make him the less to crave sustenance, but continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings; yet he neither needs food nor desires it. The place, no doubt, reminds him of the manna, and encourages him to hope that God will sustain him here, and in due time bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like him, fretful and distrustful.

9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? 10 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: 12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? 14 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 15 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be

prophet in thy room. 17 And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. 18 Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

Here is, I. Elijah housed in a cave at Mount Horeb, which is called *the mount of God*, because on it God had formerly manifested his glory. And perhaps this was the same cave, or cleft of a rock, in which Moses was hidden when the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed his name, Exod xxxiii. 22. What Elijah proposed to himself in coming to lodge here, I cannot conceive, unless it was to indulge his melancholy, or to satisfy his curiosity and assist his faith and devotion with the sight of that famous place where the law was given and where so many great things were done, and hoping to meet with God himself there, where Moses met with him, or in token of his abandoning his people Israel, who hated to be reformed (in the latter case, it agrees with Jeremiah's wish (Jer. ix. 2), *O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them, for they are all adulterers*) and so it was a bad omen of God's forsaking them; or it was because he thought he could not be safe any where else, and to this instance of the hardships this good man was reduced to the apostle refers, Heb. xi. 38. *They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

II. The visit God paid to him there and the enquiry he made concerning him: *The word of the Lord came to him.* We cannot go any where to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. *Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?* Ps. cxxxix. 7, &c. God will take care of his out-casts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses. John saw the visions of the Almighty when he was in banishment in the isle of Patmos, Rev. i. 9. The question God puts to the prophet is, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* v. 9, and again v. 13. This is a reproof, 1. For his fleeing hither. "What brings thee so far from home? Dost thou flee from Jezebel? Couldst thou not depend upon almighty power for thy protection?" Lay the emphasis upon the pronoun *thou*. "What thou! So great a man, so great a prophet, so famed for resolution—dost thou flee thy country, forsake thy colours thus?" This cowardice would have been more excusable in another, and not so bad an example. *Should such a man as I flee?* Neh. vi. 11. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be thus shaken.* 2. For his fix-

ing here. "What doest thou here, in this cave? Is this a place for a prophet of the Lord to lodge in? Is this a time for such men to retreat, when the public has such need of them?" In the retirement to which God sent Elijah (*ch. xvii.*) he was a blessing to a poor widow at Sarepta, but here he had no opportunity of doing good. Note, It concerns us often to enquire whether we be in our place and in the way of our duty. "Am I where I should be, whither God calls me, where my business lies, and where I may be useful?"

III. The account he gives of himself, in answer to the question put to him (*v. 10*), and repeated, in answer to the same question, *v. 14*.

1. He excuses his retreat, and desires it may not be imputed to his want of zeal for reformation, but to his despair of success. For God knew, and his own conscience witnessed for him, that as long as there was any hope of doing good he had been *very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts*; but now that he had *laboured in vain*, and all his endeavours were to no purpose, he thought it was time to give up the cause, and mourn for what he could not mend. *Abi in cellam, et dic, Misereere mei—"Awoy to thy cell, and cry, Have compassion on me."*

2. He complains of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety to which they had arrived: "*The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant*, and that is the reason I have forsaken them; who can stay among them, to see every thing that is sacred ruined and run down?" This the apostle calls his *making intercession against Israel*, *ROM. xi. 2, 3*. He had often been, of choice, their advocate, but now he is necessitated to be their accuser, before God. Thus *John v. 45*, *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, whom you trust*. Those are truly miserable that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them. (1.) He charges them with having forsaken God's covenant; though they retained circumcision, the sign and seal of it, yet they had quitted his worship and service, which was the intention of it. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and let fall their communion with him, do really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him. (2.) With having *thrown down his altars*, not only deserted them and suffered them to go to decay, but, in their zeal for the worship of Baal, wilfully demolished them. This alludes to the private altars which the prophets of the Lord had, and which good people attended, who could not go up to Jerusalem and would not worship the calves nor Baal. These separate altars, though breaking in upon the unity of the church, yet, being erected and attended by those that sincerely aimed at the glory of God and served him faithfully, the seeming schism was excused. God owned them for his altars, as well as that at

Jerusalem, and the putting of them down is charged upon Israel as a crying sin. But this was not all. (3.) *They have slain thy prophets with the sword*, who, it is probable ministered at those altars. Jezebel, a foreigner, slew them (*ch. xviii. 4*), but the crime is charged upon the body of the people because the generality of them were *consenting to their death*, and pleased with it.

3. He gives the reasons why he retired into this desert and took up his residence in this cave. (1.) It was because he could not appear to any purpose: "*I only am left, and have none to second or support me in any good design*. They all said, *The Lord he is God*, but none of them would stand by me nor offer to shelter me. That point then gained was presently lost again, and Jezebel can do more to debauch them than I can to reform them. What can one do against thousands?" Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. No one is willing to venture alone, forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them. (2.) It was because he could not appear with any safety. "*They seek my life to take it away*; and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude than lose my life in a fruitless endeavour to reform those that hate to be reformed."

IV. God's manifestation of himself to him. Did he come hither to meet with God? He shall find that God will not fail to give him the meeting. Moses was put into the cave when God's glory passed before him; but Elijah was called out of it: *Stand upon the mount before the Lord*, *v. 11*. He *saw no manner of similitude*, any more than Israel did when God *talked to them in Horeb*. But, 1. He heard a strong wind, and saw the terrible effects of it, for it rent the mountains and tore the rocks. Thus was the trumpet sounded before the Judge of heaven and earth, by his angels, whom he makes *spirits*, or *winds* (*Ps. civ. 4*), sounded so loud that the earth not only rang, but rent again. 2. He felt the shock of an earthquake. 3. He saw an eruption of fire, *v. 12*. These were to usher in the designed manifestation of the divine glory, angels being employed in them, whom he *maketh a flame of fire*, and who, as his ministers, march before him, to *prepare in this desert a highway for our God*. But, 4. At last he perceived a *still small voice*, in which *the Lord was*, that is, by which he spoke to him, and not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Those struck an awe upon him, awakened his attention, and inspired humility and reverence; but God chose to make known his mind to him in whispers soft, not in those dreadful sounds. When he perceived this, (1.) *He wrapped his face in his mantle*, as one afraid to look upon the glory of God, and apprehensive that it would dazzle his eyes and overcome him. The angels *cover their faces* before God in token of reverence, *Isa. vi. 2*. Elijah hid his face in token of shame for having been

such a coward as to flee from his duty when he had such a God of power to stand by him in it. The wind, and earthquake, and fire, did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord than by his terrors. (2.) He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. This method of God's manifesting himself here at Mount Horeb seems to refer to the discoveries God formerly made of himself at this place to Moses. [1.] Then there was a tempest, an earthquake, and fire (Heb. xii. 18); but, when God would show Moses his glory, he *proclaimed his goodness*; and so here: *He was, the Word was, in the still small voice.* [2.] Then the law was thus given to Israel, with the appearances of terror first and then with a voice of words; and Elijah being now called to revive that law, especially the first two commandments of it, is here taught how to manage it; he must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but he must endeavour, with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not forsake them when he should be addressing them. Faith comes by hearing the word of God; miracles do but make way for it. [3.] Then God spoke to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias, he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid; see Heb. xii. 18, &c.

V. The orders God gives him to execute. He repeats the question he had put to him before, "*What doest thou here?*" This is not a place for thee now." Elijah gives the same answer (v. 14), complaining of Israel's apostasy from God and the ruin of religion among them. To this God gives him a reply. When he wished *he might die* (v. 4) God answered him not according to his folly, but was so far from letting him die that he not only kept him alive then, but provided that he should never die, but be translated. But when he complained of his discouragement (and whether should God's prophets go with their complaints of that kind but to their Master?) God gave him an answer. He sends him back with directions to appoint Hazael king of Syria (v. 15), Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the eminency of the prophetic office (v. 16), which is intended as a prediction that by these God would chastise the degenerate Israelites, plead his own cause among them, and *avenge the quarrel of his covenant*, v. 17. Elijah complained that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished. The judgment of famine was too gentle, and had not reclaimed them; it was removed before they were reformed: "*I have been jealous,*" says he, "for God's name, but he himself has not appeared jealous for it." "Well," says God, "be content; it is all in good

time; *judgments are prepared for those scorner*s, though they are not yet inflicted; the persons are pitched upon, and shall now be nominated, for they are now in being, who shall do the business." 1. "When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall make bloody work among the people (2 Kings viii. 12) and so correct them for their idolatry." 2. "When Jehu comes to be king of Israel he shall make bloody work with the royal family, and shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry." 3. "Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and, when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and be a remaining witness against the apostasy of Israel, and even he shall slay the children of Bethel, that idolatrous city." Note, The wicked are reserved to judgment. *Evil pursues sinners*, and there is no escaping it; to attempt an escape is but to run from one sword's point upon another. See Jer. xviii. 44, *He that flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare.* Elisha, with the sword of the Spirit, shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war and Jehu's sword of justice. *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*, Isa. xi. 4; 2 Thess. ii. 8; Hos. vi. 5. It is a great comfort to good men and good ministers to think that God will never want instruments to do his work in his time, but, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

VI. The comfortable information God gives him of the number of Israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone (v. 18): *I have left 7000 in Israel* (besides Judea) *who have not bowed the knee to Baal.* Note, 1. In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostasy God has always had, and will have, a remnant faithful to him, some that keep their integrity and do not go down the stream. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah (Rom. xi. 4) and applies it to his own day, when the Jews generally rejected the gospel. *Yet*, says he, *of this time also there is a remnant*, v. 5 2. It is God's work to preserve that remnant and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace they could not have distinguished themselves: *I have left me*; it is therefore said to be a remnant *according to the election of grace*. 3. It is but a little remnant, in comparison with the degenerate race; what are 7000 to the thousands of Israel? Yet, when those of every age come together, they will be found many more, 12,000 *sealed out of each tribe*, Rev. vii. 4. 4. God's faithful ones are often his hidden ones (Ps. lxxxiii. 3), and the visible church is scarcely visible, the wheat lost in the chaff and the gold in the dross, till the sifting, refining, separating day comes. 5. *The Lord knows those that are his*, though we do not; he sees in secret. 6. There are more good people in the world

than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think the corruption is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven, as we shall miss a great many whom we thought to meet there, so we shall meet a great many whom we little thought to find there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity and more extensive.

19 So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. 20 And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again; for what have I done to thee? 21 And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha was named last in the orders God gave to Elijah, but he was first called, for by him the other two were to be called. He must come in Elijah's room; yet Elijah is forward to raise him, and is far from being jealous of his successor, but rejoices to think that he shall leave the work of God in such good hands. Concerning the call of Elisha observe, 1. That it was an unexpected surprising call. Elijah found him by divine direction, or perhaps he was before acquainted with him and knew where to find him. He found him, not in the schools of the prophets, but in the field, not reading, nor praying, nor sacrificing, but ploughing, v. 19. Though a great man (as appears by his feast, v. 21), master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he did not think it any disparagement to him to follow his business himself, and not only to inspect his servants, but himself to lay his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not at all put us out of the way of our heavenly calling, any more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough to feed Israel and to sow the seed of the word, as the apostles were taken from fishing to catch men. Elisha enquired not after Elijah, but was anticipated with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us, first. 2. That it was a powerful call. Elijah did but cast his mantle upon him (v. 19), in token of friendship, that he

would take him under his care and tuition as he did under his mantle, and to be one with him in the same clothes, or in token of his being clothed with the spirit of Elijah (now he put some of his honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, Num. xxvii. 20); but, when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, 2 Kings ii. 13. And immediately he left the oxen to go as they would, and ran after Elijah, and assured him that he would follow him presently, v. 20. An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing (Ps. cx. 3), nor would any come to Christ unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to ask leave, but only to take leave, of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his (Luke ix. 61) that desired he might bid those farewell that were at home, but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bade him go back and do it, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back, and not return, for anything he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that those who are good are good of choice and not by constraint, not pressed men, but volunteers. 3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell-feast he made for his family (v. 21), though he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel and her party. It was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to wear his coat; yet Elisha cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great feast when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ. 4. That it was an effectual call. Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but ministered to him as his servitor, poured water on his hands, 2 Kings iii. 11. It is of great advantage to young ministers to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom, and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach must have time to learn; and those that hope hereafter to rise and rule must be willing at first to stoop and serve.

## CHAP. XX.

This chapter is the history of a war between Ben hadad king of Syria and Ahab king of Israel, in which Ahab was, once and again, victorious. We read nothing of Elijah or Elisha in this

story; Jezebel's rage, it is probable, had abated, and the persecution of the prophets began to cool, which glean of peace Elijah improved. He appeared not at court, but, being told how many thousands of good people there were in Israel more than he thought of, employed himself, as we may suppose, in founding religious houses, schools, or colleges of prophets, in several parts of the country, to be nurseries of religion, that they might help to reform the nation when the throne and court would not be reformed. While he was thus busied, God favoured the nation with the successes we here read of, which were the more remarkable because obtained against Ben-hadad king of Syria, whose successor, Hazael, was ordained to be a scourge to Israel. They must shortly suffer by the Syrians, and yet now triumphed over them, that, if possible, they might be led to repentance by the goodness of God. Here is, I. Ben-hadad's descent upon Israel, and his insolent demand, ver. 1—11. II. The defeat Ahab gave him, encouraged and directed by a prophet, ver. 12—21. III. The Syrians rallying again, and the second defeat Ahab gave them, ver. 22—30. IV. The covenant of peace Ahab made with Ben-hadad, when he had him at his mercy (ver. 31—34), for which he is reproved and threatened by a prophet, ver. 35—43.

**A**ND Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. 2 And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, 3 Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, *even* the goodliest, *are* mine. 4 And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I *am* thine, and all that I have. 5 And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; 6 Yet I will send my servants unto thee to-morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, *that* whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put *it* in their hand, and take *it* away. 7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this *man* seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. 8 And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Harken not *unto him*, nor consent. 9 Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. 10 And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and

said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. 11 And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell *him*, Let not him that girdeth on *his harness* boast himself as he that putteth it off.

Here is, I. The threatening descent which Benhadad made upon Ahab's kingdom, and the siege he laid to Samaria, his royal city, v. 1. What the ground of the quarrel was we are not told; covetousness and ambition were the principle, which would never want some pretence or other. David in his time had quite subdued the Syrians and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostasy from God makes them formidable again. Asa had tempted the Syrians to invade Israel once (*ch.* xv. 18—20), and now they did it of their own accord. It is dangerous bringing a foreign force into the country: posterity may pay dearly for it. Ben-hadad had with him thirty-two kings, who were either tributaries to him, and bound in duty to attend him, or confederates with him, and bound in interest to assist him. How little did the title of king look when all these poor petty governors pretended to it!

II. The treaty between these two kings. Surely Israel's defence had departed from them, or else the Syrians could not have marched so readily, and with so little opposition, to Samaria, the head and heart of the country, a city lately built, and therefore, we may suppose, not well fortified, but likely to fall quickly into the hands of the invaders; both sides are aware of this, and therefore,

1. Ben-hadad's proud spirit sends Ahab a very insolent demand, v. 2, 3. A parley is sounded, and a trumpeter (we may suppose) is sent into the city, to let Ahab know that he will raise the siege upon condition that Ahab become his vassal (nay, his *villain*), and not only pay him a tribute out of what he has, but make over his title to Ben-hadad, and hold all at his will, even his wives and children, the goodliest of them. The manner of expression is designed to gall them; "All shall be mine, without exception."

2. Ahab's poor spirit sends Ben-hadad a very disgraceful submission. It is general indeed (he cannot mention particulars in his surrender with so much pleasure as Ben-hadad did in his demand), but it is effectual: *I am thine, and all that I have, v. 4.* See the effect of sin. (1.) If he had not by sin provoked God to depart from him, Ben-hadad could not have made such a demand. Sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of divine protection. If God may not rule us, our enemies shall. A rebel to God is a slave to all besides. Ahab had prepared his silver and gold for Baal, Hos. ii. 8. Justly therefore is it taken from him; such



an alienating amounts to a forfeiture. (2.) If he had not by sin wronged his own conscience, and set that against him, he could not have made such a mean surrender. Guilt dispirits men, and makes them cowards. He knew Baal could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore was content to buy his life upon any terms. Skin for skin, and all that is dear to him, he will give for it; he will rather live a beggar than not die a prince.

3. Ben-hadad's proud spirit rises upon his submission, and becomes yet more insolent and imperious, v. 5, 6. Ahab had laid his all at his feet, at his mercy, expecting that one king would use another generously, that this acknowledgment of Ben-hadad's sovereignty would content him, the honour was sufficient for the present, and he might hereafter make use of it if he saw cause (*Satis est prostrasse leoni—It suffices the lion to have laid his victim prostrate*); but this will not serve. (1.) Ben-hadad is as covetous as he is proud, and cannot go away unless he have the possession as well as the dominion. He thinks it not enough to call it his, unless he have it in his hands. He will not so much as lend Ahab the use of his own goods above a day longer. (2.) He is as spiteful as he is haughty. Had he come himself to select what he had a mind for, it would have shown some respect to a crowned head; but he will send his servants to insult the prince, and hector over him, to rifle the palace, and strip it of all its ornaments; nay, to give Ahab the more vexation, they shall be ordered, not only to take what they please, but, if they can learn which are the persons or things that Ahab is in a particular manner fond of, to take those:  *whatsoever is pleasant in thy eyes they shall take away*. We are often crossed in that which we most dote upon; and that proves least safe which is most dear. (3.) He is as unreasonable as he is unjust, and will construe the surrender Ahab made for himself as made for all his subjects too, and will have them also to lie at his mercy: "They shall search, not only thy house, but *the houses of thy servants* too, and plunder them at discretion." Blessed be God for peace and property, and that what we have we can call our own.

4. Ahab's poor spirit begins to rise too, upon this growing insolence; and, if it becomes not bold, yet it becomes desperate, and he will rather hazard his life than give up all thus. (1.) Now he takes advice of his privy-council, who encourage him to stand it out. He speaks but poorly (v. 7), appeals to them whether Ben-hadad be not an unreasonable enemy, and do not seek mischief. What else could he expect from one who, without any provocation given him, had invaded his country and besieged his capital city? He owns to them how he had truckled to him before, and will have them advise him what he should do in this strait; and

they speak bravely (*Hearken not to him, nor consent, v. 8*), promising no doubt to stand by him in the refusal. (2.) Yet he expresses himself very modestly in his denial, v. 9. He owns Ben-hadad's dominion over him. "Tell my lord the king I have no design to affront him, nor to recede from the surrender I have already made; what I offered at first I will stand to, *but this thing I may not do*; I must not give what is none of my own." It was a mortification to Ben-hadad that even such an abject spirit as Ahab's durst deny him; yet it should seem, by his manner of expressing himself, that he durst not have done it if his people had not animated him.

5. Ben-hadad proudly swears the ruin of Samaria. The threatening waves of his wrath, meeting with this check, rage and foam, and make a noise. In his fury, he imprecates the impotent revenge of his gods, *if the dust of Samaria serve for handfuls for his army* (v. 10), so numerous, so resolute, an army will he bring into the field against Samaria, and so confident is he of their success; it will be done as easily as the taking up of a handful of dust; all shall be carried away, even the ground on which the city stands. Thus confident is his pride, thus cruel is his malice; this prepares him to be ruined, though such a prince and such a people are unworthy of the satisfaction of seeing him ruined.

6. Ahab sends him a decent rebuke to his assurance, dares not defy his menaces, only reminds him of the uncertain turns of war (v. 11): "Let not him that begins a war, and is girding on his sword, his armour, his harness, boast of victory, or think himself sure of it, *as if he had put it off*, and had come home a conqueror." This was one of the wisest words that ever Ahab spoke, and is a good item or memento to us all; it is folly to boast beforehand of any day, since we know not what it may bring forth (Prov. xxvii. 1), but especially to boast of a day of battle, which may prove as much against us as we promise ourselves it will be for us. It is impolitic to despise an enemy, and to be too sure of victory is the way to be beaten. Apply it to our spiritual conflicts. Peter fell by his confidence. While we are here we are but girding on the harness, and therefore must never boast as though we had put it off. *Happy is the man that feareth always*, and is never off his watch.

12 And it came to pass, when *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, *Set yourselves in array*. And they set themselves in array against the city. 13 And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast

thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD. 14 And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, *Even* by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. 15 Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, *even* all the children of Israel, *being* seven thousand. 16 And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad *was* drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. 17 And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. 18 And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. 19 So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. 20 And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen. 21 And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

The treaty between the besiegers and the besieged being broken off abruptly, we have here an account of the battle that ensued immediately.

1. The Syrians, the besiegers, had their directions from a drunken king, who gave orders over his cups, as he was *drinking* (v. 12), *drinking himself drunk* (v. 16) *with the kings in the pavilions*, and this at noon. Drunkenness is a sin which armies and their officers have of old been addicted to. Say not thou then that the former days were, in this respect, better than these, though these are bad enough. Had he not been very secure he would not have sat to drink; and, had he not been intoxicated, he would not have been so very secure. Security and eosuality went together in the old world, and Sodom, Luke xvii. 26, &c. Ben-hadad's

drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall, as Belshazzar's was, Dan. v. How could he prosper that preferred his pleasure before his business, and kept his kings to drink with him when they should have been at their respective posts to fight for him? In his drink, 1. He orders the town to be invested, the engines fixed, and every thing got ready for the making of a general attack (v. 12), but stirs not from his drunken club to see it done. *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is such a child.* 2. When the besieged made a sally (and, by that time, he was far gone) he gave orders to take them alive (v. 18), not to kill them, which might have been done more easily and safely, but to seize them, which gave them an opportunity of killing the aggressors; so imprudent was he in the orders he gave, as well as unjust, in ordering them to be taken prisoners though they came for peace and to renew the treaty. Thus, as is usual, he drinks, and forgets the law, both the policies and the justice of war.

11. The Israelites, the besieged, had their directions from an inspired prophet, one of the prophets of the Lord, whom Ahab had hated and persecuted: *And behold a prophet, even one, drew near to the king of Israel; so it may be read, v. 13.*

1. Behold, and wonder, that God should send a prophet with a kind and gracious message to so wicked a prince as Ahab was; but he did it, (1.) For his people Israel's sake, who, though wickedly degenerated, were the seed of Abraham his friend and Jacob his chosen, the children of the covenant, and not yet cast off. (2.) That he might magnify his mercy, in doing good to one so evil and unthankful, might either bring him to repentance or leave him the more inexcusable. (3.) That he might mortify the pride of Ben-hadad and check his insolence. Ahab's idolatry shall be punished hereafter, but Ben-hadad's haughtiness shall be chastised now; for God resists the proud, and is pleased to say that *he fears the wrath of the enemy*, Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. There was but one prophet perhaps to be had in Samaria, and he drew near with this message, intimating that he had been forced to keep at a distance. Ahab, in his prosperity, would not have borne the sight of him, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves can give him any assistance. He enquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him unasked, for he waits to be gracious.

2. Two things the prophet does:—(1.) He animates Ahab with an assurance of victory, which was more than all the elders of Israel could give him (v. 8), though they promised to stand by him. This prophet, who is not named (for he *spoke in God's name*), tells him from God that this very day the siege shall be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed, v. 13. When the prophet said, *Thus saith*

the Lord, we may suppose Ahab began to tremble, expecting a message of wrath; but he is revived when it proves a gracious one. He is informed what use he ought to make of this blessed turn of affairs: "*Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah*, the sovereign Lord of all." God's foretelling a thing that was so very unlikely proved that it was his own doing. (2.) He instructs him what to do for the gaining of this victory. [1.] He must not stay till the enemy attacked him, but must sally out upon them and surprise them in their trenches. [2.] The persons employed must be the *young men of the princes of the provinces*, the pages, the footmen, who were few in number, only 232, utterly unacquainted with war, and the unlikeliest men that could be thought of for such a bold attempt; yet these must do it, these weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong, that, while Ben-hadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's may be prevented and precluded, and the *excellency of the power may appear to be of God*. [3.] Ahab must himself so far testify his confidence in the word of God as to command in person, though, in the eye of reason, he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it. But it is fit that those who have the benefit of God's promises should enter upon them. Yet, [4.] He is allowed to make use of what other forces he has at hand, to follow the blow, when these young men have broken the ice. All he had in Samaria, or within call, were but 7000 men, v. 15. It is observable that it is the same number with theirs that had not *bowed the knee to Baal* (ch. xix. 18), though, it is likely, not the same men.

III. The issue was accordingly. The proud Syrians were beaten, and the poor despised Israelites were more than conquerors. The young men gave an alarm to the Syrians just at noon, at high dinner-time, supported by what little force they had, v. 16. Ben-hadad despised them at first (v. 18), but when they had, with unparalleled bravery and dexterity, *slain every one his man*, and so put the army into disorder, that proud man durst not face them, but mounted immediately, drunk as he was, and made the best of his way, v. 20. See how God *takes away the spirit of princes*, and makes himself *terrible to the kings of the earth*. Now where are the silver and gold he demanded of Ahab? Where are the handfuls of Samaria's dust? Those that are most secure are commonly least courageous. Ahab failed not to improve this advantage, but *slew the Syrians with a great slaughter*, v. 21. Note, God oftentimes makes one wicked man a scourge to another.

22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the

return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee. 23 And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. 24 And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: 25 And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. 26 And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. 27 And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country. 28 And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 29 And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians a hundred thousand footmen in one day. 30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

We have here an account of another successful campaign which Ahab, by divine aid, made against the Syrians, in which he gave them a greater defeat than in the former. Strange! Ahab idolatrous and yet victorious, a persecutor and yet a conqueror! God has wise and holy ends in suffering wicked men to prosper, and glorifies his own name thereby.

I. Ahab is admonished by a prophet to

prepare for another war, v. 22. It should seem, he was now secure, and looked but a little way before him. Those that are careless of their souls are often as careless of their outward affairs; but the prophet (to whom God made known the following counsels of the Syrians) told him they would renew their attempt at the return of the year, hoping to retrieve the honour they had lost and be avenged for the blow they had received. He therefore had him strengthen himself, put himself into a posture of defence, and be ready to give them a warm reception. God had decreed the end, but Ahab must use the means, else he tempts God: "Help thyself, strengthen thyself, and God will help and strengthen thee." The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their malice, and, though they may take some breathing-time for themselves, yet they are still *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the church*. It concerns us always to expect assaults from our spiritual enemies, and therefore to mark and see what we do.

II. Ben-hadad is advised by those about him concerning the operations of the next campaign. 1. They advised him to *change his ground*, v. 23. They took it for granted that it was not Israel, but Israel's gods, that beat them (so great a regard was then universally had to invisible powers); but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah—that he was *many*, whereas he is one and his name one,—that he was *their* God only, a local deity, peculiar to that nation, whereas he is the Creator and ruler of all the world,—and that he was a God of the hills only, because David their great prophet had said, *I will lift up my eyes to the hills whence cometh my help* (Ps. cxxi. 1), and that *his foundation was in the holy mountain* (Ps. lxxxvii. 1; lxxxviii. 54), and much was said of his *holy hill* (Ps. xv. 1; xxiv. 3); supposing him altogether such a one as their imaginary deities, they fancied he was confined to his hills, and could not or would not come down from them, and therefore an army in the valley would be below his cognizance and from under his protection. Thus vain were the *Gentiles in their imaginations* concerning God, so wretchedly were *their foolish hearts darkened*, and, *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. 2. They advised him to change his officers (v. 24, 25), not to employ the kings, who were commanders by birth, but captains rather, who were commanders by merit, who were inured to war, would not affect to make a show like the kings, but would go through with business. Let every man be employed in that which he is brought up to and used to, and preferred to that which he is fit for. Syria, it seems, was rich and populous, when it could furnish recruits sufficient, after so great a defeat, *horse for horse, chariot for chariot*.

III. Both armies take the field Ben-

hadad, with his Syrians, encamps near Aphek, in the tribe of Asher. It is probable that Asher was a city in his own possession, one of those which his father had won (v. 34), and the country about it was flat and level, and fit for his purpose, v. 26. Ahab, with his forces, posted himself at some distance over against them, v. 27. The disproportion of numbers was very remarkable. *The children of Israel*, who were cantoned in two battalions, looked like *two little flocks of kids*, their numbers small, their equipage mean, and the figure they made contemptible; *but the Syrians filled the country with their numbers, their noise, their chariots, their carriages, and their baggage*.

IV. Ahab is encouraged to fight the Syrians, notwithstanding their advantages and confidence. A man of God is sent to him, to tell him that this numerous army shall *all be delivered into his hand* (v. 28), but not for his sake; he it known to him, he is utterly unworthy for whom God will do this. God would not do it because Ahab had praised God or prayed to him (we do not read that he did either), but because the Syrians had blasphemed God, and had said, *He is the God of the hills and not of the valleys*; therefore God will do it in his own vindication, and to preserve the honour of his own name. If the Syrians had said, "Ahab and his people have forgotten their God, and so put themselves out of his protection, and therefore we may venture to attack them," God would probably have delivered Israel into their hands; but when they go upon a presumption so very injurious to the divine omnipotence, and the honour of him who is Lord of all hosts, not only in hills and valleys, but in heaven and earth, which they are willingly ignorant of, they shall be undelivered, at the expense of that vast army which is so much their pride and confidence.

V. After the armies had faced one another seven days (the Syrians, it is likely, boasting, and the Israelites trembling), they engaged, and the Syrians were totally routed, 100,000 men slain by the sword of Israel in the field of battle (v. 29), and 27,000 men, that thought themselves *safe under the walls of Aphek*, a fortified city (from the walls of which the shooters might annoy the enemy if they pursued them, 2 Sam. xi. 24), found their bane where they hoped for protection: the wall fell upon them, probably overthrown by an earthquake, and, the cities of Canaan being walled up to heaven, it reached a great way, and they were all killed, or hurt, or overwhelmed with dismay. Ben-hadad, who thought his city Aphek would hold out against the conquerors, finding it thus unwalled, and the remnant of his forces dispersed and dispersed, had nothing but secrecy to rely upon for safety, and therefore hid himself in a *chamber within a chamber*, lest the pursuers should seize him. See how the greatest confidence often ends in the

greatest cowardice. "Now is the God of Israel the *God of the valleys* or no?" He shall know now that he is forced into an inner chamber to hide himself, see ch. xxii. 25.

31 And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. 32 So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is he yet alive? he is my brother.* 33 Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. 34 And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. 35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. 36 Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. 37 Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. 38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. 39 And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man

unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. 40 And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. 41 And he hastened, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. 42 And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. 43 And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

Here is an account of what followed upon the victory which Israel obtained over the Syrians.

1. Ben-hadad's tame and mean submission. Even in his inner chamber he feared, and would, if he could, flee further, though none pursued. His servants, seeing him and themselves reduced to the last extremity, advised that they should surrender at discretion, and make themselves prisoners and petitioners to Ahab for their lives, v. 31. The servants will put their lives in their hands, and venture first, and their master will act according as they speed. Their inducement to take this course is the great reputation the kings of Israel had for clemency above any of their neighbours: "We have heard that they are merciful kings, not oppressive to their subjects that are under their power" (as governments then went, that of Israel was one of the most easy and gentle), "and therefore not cruel to their enemies when they lie at their mercy." Perhaps they had this notion of the kings of Israel because they had heard that the God of Israel proclaimed his name *gracious and merciful*, and they concluded their kings would make their God their pattern. It was an honour to the kings of Israel to be thus represented, as indeed every Israelite is then dressed as becomes him when he puts on bowels of mercies. "They are merciful kings, therefore we may hope to find mercy upon our submission." This encouragement poor sinners have to repent and humble themselves before God. "Have we not heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rend our hearts and return to him." Joel ii. 13. That is evangelical repentance which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ; there is forgiveness with him. Two things Ben-hadad's servants undertake to represent

to Ahab:—1. Their master a penitent; for they *girded sackcloth on their loins*, as mourners, and *put ropes on their heads*, as condemned criminals going to execution, pretending to be sorry that they had invaded his country and disturbed his repose, and owning that they deserved to be hanged for it. Here they are ready to do penance for it, and throw themselves at the feet of him whom they had injured. Many pretend to repent of their wrong-doing, when it does not succeed, who, if they had prospered in it, would have justified it and gloried in it. 2. Their master a beggar, a beggar for his life: *Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, "I pray thee, let me live, v. 32. Though I live a perpetual exile from my own country, and captive in this, yet, upon any terms, let me live."* What a great change is here, (1.) In his condition! How has he fallen from the height of power and prosperity to the depths of disgrace and distress, and all the miseries of poverty and slavery! See the uncertainty of human affairs; such turns are they subject to that the spoke which was uppermost may soon come to be undermost. (2.) In his temper—in the beginning of the chapter hectoring, swearing, and threatening, and none more high in his demands, but here crouching and whining and none more low in his requests! How meanly does he beg his life at the hand of him upon whom he had there been trampling! The most haughty in prosperity are commonly most abject in adversity: an even spirit will be the same in both conditions. See how God glorifies himself when he *looks upon proud men and abases them, and hides them in the dust together*, Job xl. 11—13.

II. Ahab's foolish acceptance of his submission, and the league he suddenly made with him upon it. He was proud to be thus courted by him whom he had feared, and enquired for him with great tenderness: *Is he yet alive? He is my brother*, brother-king, though not brother-Israelite; and Ahab valued himself more upon his royalty than on his religion, and others accordingly. *"Is he thy brother, Ahab?"* Did he use thee like a brother when he sent thee that barbarous message? v. 5, 6. Would he have called thee brother if he had been the conqueror? Would he now have called himself *thy servant* if he had not been reduced to the utmost strait? Canst thou suffer thyself to be thus imposed upon by a forced and counterfeit submission?" This word *brother* they caught at (v. 33), and were thereby encouraged to go and fetch him to the king. He that calls him *brother* will let him live. Let poor penitents hear God, in his word, calling them *children* (Jer. xxxi. 20), catch at it, echo to it, and call him *Father*. Ben-hadad, upon his submission, shall not only be honourably conveyed (he *took him up into the chariot*), but treated with as an ally (v. 34): he made a *covenant with him*, not consulting God's prophets, or the elders of the land, or him-

self, concerning what was fit to be insisted on, but, as if Ben-hadad had been conqueror, he shall make his own terms. He might now have demanded some of Ben-hadad's cities, when all of them lay at the mercy of his victorious army; but was content with the restitution of his own. He might now have demanded the stores, and treasures, and magazines of Damascus, to augment the wealth and strength of his own kingdom, but was content with a poor liberty, at his own expense, to build streets there, a point of honour and no advantage, or no more than what the kings of Syria had had in Samaria, though they had never had so much power as he had now to support the demand of it. With this covenant he sent him away, without so much as reproving him for his blasphemous reflections upon the God of Israel, for whose honour Ahab had no concern. Note, There are those on whom success is ill bestowed; they know not how to serve God, or their generation, or even their own true interests, with their prosperity. *Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.*

III. The reproof given to Ahab for his clemency to Ben-hadad and his covenant with him. It was given him by a prophet, in the name of the Lord, the Jews say by Micaiah, and not unlikely, for Ahab complains of him (*ch. xxii. 5*) that he used to *prophecy evil concerning him*. This prophet designed to reprove Ahab by a parable, that he might oblige him to condemn himself, as Nathan and the woman of Tekoa did David. To make his parable the more plausible, he finds it necessary to put himself into the posture of a wounded soldier. 1. With some difficulty he gets himself wounded, for he would not wound himself with his own hands. He commanded one of his brother prophets, his *neighbour, or companion* (for so the word signifies), to smite him, and this in God's name (v. 35), but finds him not so willing to give the blow as he is to receive it; he refused to smite him: others, he thought, were forward enough to smite prophets, they need not smite one another. We cannot but think it was from a good principle he declined it. "If it must be done, let another do it, not I; I cannot find it in my heart to strike my friend." Good men can much more easily receive a wrongful blow than give one; yet because he disobeyed an express command of God (which was so much the worse if he was himself a prophet, like that other disobedient prophet (*ch. xiii. 24*), he was presently *slain by a lion*, v. 36. This was intended, not only to show, in general, how provoking disobedience is (Col. iii. 6), but to intimate to Ahab (who no doubt was told the story) that if a good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said, *Smite*, of much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy, who spared his enemy and God's,

when God said, *Smite. Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, more pure or more compassionate than his Maker?* We must be merciful as he is merciful, and not otherwise. The next he met with made no difficulty of smiting him (*Volenti non fit injuria—He that asks for an injury is not wronged by it*) and did it so that he wounded him, v. 37. He fetched blood with the blow, probably in his face. 2. Wounded as he was, and disguised with ashes that he might not be known to be a prophet, he made his application to the king in a story wherein he charged himself with such a crime as the king was now guilty of in sparing Ben-hadad, and waited for the king's judgment upon it. The case in short is this—A prisoner taken in the battle was committed to his custody by a man (we may suppose one that had authority over him as his superior officer) with this charge, *If he be missing, thy life shall be for his life, v. 39.* The prisoner has made his escape through his carelessness. Can the chancery in the king's breast relieve him against his captain, who demands his life in lieu of the prisoner's? "By no means," says the king, "thou shouldst either not have undertaken the trust or been more careful and faithful to it; there is no remedy (*Curat lex—Let the law take its course*), thou hast forfeited thy bond, and execution must go out upon it: *So shall thy doom be, thou thyself hast decided it.*" Now the prophet has what he would have, puts off his disguise, and is known by Ahab himself to be a prophet (v. 41) and plainly tells him, "Thou art the man. Is it my doom? No, it is thine; thou thyself hast decided it. Out of thy own mouth art thou judged. God, thy superior and commander-in-chief, delivered into thy hands one plainly marked for destruction both by his own pride and God's providence, and thou hast not carelessly lost him, but wittingly and willingly dismissed him, and so hast been false to thy trust, and lost the end of thy victory; expect therefore no other than that *thy life shall go for his life, which thou hast spared*" and so it did, *ch. xxii. 35*, "and thy people for his people, whom likewise thou hast spared," and so they did afterwards, 2 Kings x. 32, 33. When their other sins brought them low, this came into the account. There is a time when *keeping back the sword from blood is doing the work of the Lord deceitfully*, Jer. xlviii. 10. Foolish pity spoils the city. 3. We are told how Ahab resented this reproof. *He went to his house heavy and displeased (v. 43)*, not truly penitent, or seeking to undo what he had done amiss, but enraged at the prophet, exasperated against God (as if he had been too severe in the sentence passed upon him), and yet vexed at himself, every way out of humour, notwithstanding his victory. He who by his providence had mortified the pride of one king, by his word cast a damp

upon the triumphs of another. *Be wise therefore, O you kings! and be instructed to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling*, Ps. ii. 10, 11.

## CHAP. XXI.

Ahab is still the unhappy subject of the sacred history; from the great affairs of his camp and kingdom this chapter leads us into his garden, and gives us an account of some all things (and all indeed they proved to him) relating to his domestic affairs. 1. Ahab is sick for Naboth's vineyard, ver. 1—4. 2. Naboth dies by Jezebel's plot, that the vineyard may escheat to Ahab, ver. 5—13. 3. Ahab goes to take possession, ver. 15—16. 4. Elijah meets him, and denounces the judgments of God against him for his injustice, ver. 17—24. 5. Upon his humiliation a reprieve is granted, ver. 25—29.

AND it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3 And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. 4 And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Here is, 1. Ahab coveting his neighbour's vineyard, which unhappily lay near his palace and conveniently for a kitchen-garden. Perhaps Naboth had been pleased that he had a vineyard which lay so advantageously for a prospect of the royal gardens, or the vending of its productions to the royal family; but the situation of it proved fatal to him. If he had had no vineyard, or it had lain obscure in some remote place, he would have preserved his life. But many a man's possessions have been his snare, and his neighbourhood to greatness has been of pernicious consequence. Ahab sets his eye and heart on this vineyard, v. 2. It will be a pretty addition to his demesne, a convenient out-let to his palace; and nothing will serve him but it must be his own. He is welcome to the fruits of it, welcome to walk in it; Naboth perhaps would have made him a lease of it for his life, to please him; but nothing will please him unless he have an absolute property in it, he and his heirs for ever. Yet he is not such a tyrant as to take it by force, but fairly proposes either to give Naboth the full value of it in money or a better vineyard in exchange. He had tamely

quitted the great advantages God had given him of enlarging his dominion for the honour of his kingdom, by his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden, only for the convenience of his house, as if to be penny wise would atone for being pound foolish. To desire a convenience to his estate was not evil (there would be no buying if there were no desire of what is bought; the virtuous woman *considers a field and buys it*); but to desire any thing inordinately, though we would compass it by lawful means, is a fruit of selfishness, as if we must engross all the conveniences, and none must live, or live comfortably, by us, contrary to the law of contentment, and the letter of the tenth commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house*. 2. The repulse he met with in this desire. Naboth would by no means part with it (v. 3): *The Lord forbid me*; and the Lord did forbid it, else he would not have been so rude and uncivil to his prince as not to gratify him in so small a matter. Canaan was in a peculiar manner God's land; the Israelites were his tenants; and this was one of the conditions of their leases, that they should not alienate (no, not to one another) any part of that which fell to their lot, unless in case of extreme necessity, and then only till the year of jubilee, Lev. xxv. 28. Now Naboth foresaw that, if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs, no, not in the jubilee. He would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men, and therefore in this matter desires to be excused. Ahab knew the law, or should have known it, and therefore did ill to ask that which his subject could not grant without sin. Some conceive that Naboth looked upon his earthly inheritance as an earnest of his lot in the heavenly Canaan, and therefore would not part with the former, lest it should amount to a forfeiture of the latter. He seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather hazard the king's displeasure than offend God, and probably was one of the 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal, for which, it may be, Ahab owed him a grudge. 3. Ahab's great discontent and uneasiness hereupon. He was as before (ch. xx. 43) *heavy and displeased* (v. 4), grew melancholy upon it, threw himself upon his bed, would not eat nor admit company to come to him. He could by no means digest the affront. His proud spirit aggravated the indignity Naboth did him in denying him, as a thing not to be suffered. He cursed the squeamishness of Naboth's conscience, which he pretended to consult the peace of, and secretly meditated revenge. Nor could he bear the disappointment; it cut him to the heart to be crossed in his desires, and he was perfectly sick for vexation. Note, (1.) Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and

all the enjoyments sour; it is the heaviness of the heart and the rottenness of the bones. (2.) It is a sin that is its own parent. It arises not from the condition, but from the mind. As we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace. He had all the delights of Canaan, that pleasant land, at command, the wealth of a kingdom, the pleasures of a court, and the honours and powers of a throne; and yet *all this avails him nothing* without Naboth's vineyard. Inordinate desires expose men to continual vexations, and those that are disposed to fret, be they ever so happy, will always find something or other to fret at.

5 But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? 6 And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee *another* vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. 7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, *and eat bread*, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. 8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth. 9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: 10 And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die. 11 And the men of his city, *even* the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, *and* as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. 12 They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. 13 And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, *even* against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they car-



ried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. 15 And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. 16 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Nothing but mischief is to be expected when Jezebel enters into the story—that *cursed woman*, 2 Kings ix. 34.

I. Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, and blows the coals of his corruptions. It became her to take notice of his grief and to enquire into the cause of it, v. 5. Those have forgotten both the duty and affection of the conjugal relation that interest not themselves in each other's troubles. He told her what troubled him (v. 6), yet invidiously concealed Naboth's reason for his refusal, representing it as peevish, when it was conscientious—I will not give it thee, whereas he said, I may not. What! says Jezebel (v. 7), *Dost thou govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread.* She does well to persuade him to shake off his melancholy, and not to sink under his burden, to be easy and cheerful; whatever was his grief, grieving would not redress it, but pleasantness would alleviate it. Her plea is, *Dost thou now govern Israel?* This is capable of a good sense: "Does it become so great a prince as thou art to cast thyself down for so small a matter? Thou shamest thyself, and profanest thy crown; it is below thee to take notice of so inconsiderable a thing. Art thou fit to govern Israel, who hast no better a government of thy own passions? Or hast thou so rich a kingdom at command and canst not thou be without this one vineyard?" We should learn to quiet ourselves, under our crosses, with the thoughts of the mercies we enjoy, especially our hopes of the kingdom. But she meant it in a bad sense: "*Dost thou govern Israel, and shall any subject thou hast deny thee any thing thou hast a mind to? Art thou a king? It is below thee to buy and pay, much more to beg and pray; use thy prerogative, and take by force what thou canst not compass by fair means; instead of resenting the affront thus, revenge it. If thou knowest not how to support the dignity of a king, let me alone to do it; give me but leave to make use of thy name, and I will*

soon give thee the vineyard of Naboth; right or wrong, it shall be thy own shortly, and cost thee nothing." Unhappy princes those are, and hurried apace towards their ruin, who have those about them that stir them up to acts of tyranny and teach them how to abuse their power.

II. In order to gratify him, she projects and compasses the death of Naboth. No less than his blood will serve to atone for the affront he has given to Ahab, which she thirsts after the more greedily because of his adherence to the law of the God of Israel.

1. Had she aimed only at his land, her false witnesses might have sworn him out of that by a forged deed (she could not have set up so weak a title but the elders of Jezreel would have adjudged it good); but *the adulteress will hunt for the precious life*, Prov. vi. 26. Revenge is sweet. Naboth must die, and die as a malefactor, to gratify it.

(1.) Never were more wicked orders given by any prince than those which Jezebel sent to the magistrates of Jezreel, v. 8—10. She borrows the privy-seal, but the king shall not know what she will do with it. It is probable this was not the first time he had lent it to her, but that with it she had signed warrants for the slaying of the prophets. She makes use of the king's name, knowing the thing would please him when it was done, yet fearing he might scruple at the manner of doing it; in short, she commands them, upon their allegiance, to put Naboth to death, without giving them any reason for so doing. Had she sent witnesses to inform against him, the judges (who must go *secundum allegata et probata*—according to allegations and proofs) might have been imposed upon, and their sentence might have been rather their unhappiness than their crime; but to oblige them to find the witnesses, sons of Belial, to suborn them themselves, and then to give judgment upon a testimony which they knew to be false, was such an impudent defiance to every thing that is just and sacred as we hope cannot be paralleled in any story. She must have looked upon the elders of Jezreel as men perfectly lost to every thing that is honest and honourable when she expected these orders should be obeyed. But she will put them in a way how to do it, having as much of the serpent's subtlety as she had of his poison. [1.] It must be done under colour of religion: "*Proclaim a fast; signify to your city that you are apprehensive of some dreadful judgment coming upon you, which you must endeavour to avert, not only by prayer, but by finding out and by putting away the accursed thing; pretend to be afraid that there is some great offender among you undiscovered, for whose sake God is angry with your city; charge the people, if they know of any such, on that solemn occasion to inform against him, as they regard the welfare of the city; and at last let Naboth be fastened upon as the sus-*

pected person, probably because he does not join with his neighbours in their worship. This may serve for a pretence to set him on high among the people, to call him to the bar. Let proclamation be made that, if any one can inform the court against the prisoner, and prove him to be the Achan, they shall be heard; and then let the witnesses appear to give evidence against him." Note, There is no wickedness so vile, so horrid, but religion has sometimes been made a cloak and cover for it. We must not think at all the worse of fasting and praying for their having been sometimes thus abused, but much the worse of those wicked designs that have at any time been carried on under the shelter of them. [2.] It must be done under colour of justice too, and with the formalities of a legal process. Had she sent to them to hire some of their banditti, some desperate ruffians, to assassinate him, to stab him as he went along the streets in the night, the deed would have been bad enough; but to destroy him by a course of law, to use that power for the murdering of the innocent which ought to be their protection, was such a violent perversion of justice and judgment as was truly monstrous, yet such as we are directed not to marvel at, Eccl. v. 8. The crime they must lay to his charge was blaspheming God and the king—a complicated blasphemy. Surely she could not think to put a blasphemous sense upon the answer he had given to Ahab, as if denying him his vineyard were blaspheming the king, and giving the divine law for the reason were blaspheming God. No, she pretends not any ground at all for the charge: though there was no colour of truth in it, the witnesses must swear it, and Naboth must not be permitted to speak for himself, or cross-examine the witnesses, but immediately, under pretence of a universal detestation of the crime, they must carry him out and stone him. His blaspheming God would be the forfeiture of his life, but not of his estate, and therefore he is also charged with treason, in blaspheming the king, for which his estate was to be confiscated, that so Ahab might have his vineyard.

(2.) Never were wicked orders more wickedly obeyed than these were by the magistrates of Jezreel. They did not so much as dispute the command nor make any objections against it, though so palpably unjust, but punctually observed all the particulars of it, either because they feared Jezebel's cruelty or because they hated Naboth's piety, or both: They did so it was written in the letters (v. 11, 12), neither made any difficulty of it, nor met with any difficulty in it, but cleverly carried on the villany. They stoned Naboth to death (v. 13), and, as it should seem, his sons with him, or after him; for, when God came to make inquisition for blood, we find this article in the account (2 Kings ix. 26), *I have seen the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons.* Perhaps they

were secretly murdered, that they might not claim their father's estate nor complain of the wrong done him.

2. Let us take occasion from this sad story, (1.) To stand amazed at the wickedness of the wicked, and the power of Satan in the children of disobedience. What a holy indignation may we be filled with to see wickedness in the place of judgment! Eccl. iii. 16. (2.) To lament the hard case of oppressed innocency, and to mingle our tears with the tears of the oppressed that have no comforter, while on the side of the oppressors there is power, Eccl. iv. 1. (3.) To commit the keeping of our lives and comforts to God, for innocency itself will not always be our security. (4.) To rejoice in the belief of a judgment to come, in which such wrong judgments as these will be called over. Now we see that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked (Eccl. viii. 14), but all will be set to rights in the great day.

III. Naboth being taken off, Ahab takes possession of his vineyard. 1. The elders of Jezreel sent notice to Jezebel very unconcernedly, sent it to her as a piece of agreeable news, *Naboth is stoned and is dead*, v. 14. Here let us observe that, as obsequious as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel's orders which she sent from Samaria for the murder of Naboth, so obsequious were the elders of Samaria afterwards to Jehu's orders which he sent from Jezreel for the murder of Ahab's seventy sons, only that was not done by course of law, 2 Kings x. 6, 7. Those tyrants that by their wicked orders debauch the consciences of their inferior magistrates may perhaps find at last the wheel return upon them, and that those who will not stick to do one cruel thing for them will be as ready to do another cruel thing against them. 2. Jezebel, jocund enough that her plot succeeded so well, brings notice to Ahab that *Naboth is not alive, but dead*; therefore, says she, *Arise, take possession of his vineyard*, v. 15. He might have taken possession by one of his officers, but so pleased is he with this accession to his estate that he will make a journey to Jezreel himself to enter upon it; and it should seem he went in state too, as if he had obtained some mighty victory, for Jehu remembers long after that he and Bidkar attended him at this time, 2 Kings ix. 25. If Naboth's sons were all put to death, Ahab thought himself entitled to the estate, *ob defectum sanguinis—in default of heirs* (as our law expresses it); if not, yet, Naboth dying as a criminal, he claimed it *ob delictum criminis—os forfeited by his crime.* Or, if neither would make him a good title, the absolute power of Jezebel would give it to him, and who would dare to oppose her will? Might often prevails against right, and wonderful is the divine patience that suffers it to do so. God is certainly of purer eyes than to behold ini-

*quity*, and yet for a time *keeps silence when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he*, Hab. i. 13.

17 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which *is* in Samaria: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. 19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. 20 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee*: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. 21 Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, 22 And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked *me* to anger, and made Israel to sin. 23 And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. 24 Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. 25 But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. 26 And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all *things* as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because

he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: *but* in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

In these verses we may observe,

I. The very bad character that is given of Ahab (v. 25, 26), which comes in here to justify God in the heavy sentence passed upon him, and to show that though it was passed upon occasion of his sin in the matter of Naboth (which David's sin in the matter of Uriah did too much resemble), yet God would not have punished him so severely if he had not been guilty of many other sins, especially idolatry; whereas David, except in that one matter, *did that which was right*. But, as to Ahab, there was *none like him*, so ingenious and industrious in sin, and that made a trade of it. He *sold himself to work wickedness*, that is, he made himself a perfect slave to his lusts, and was as much at their beck and command as ever any servant was at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin, and, upon condition he might have the pleasures of it, he would take the wages of it, which is death, Rom. vi 23. Blessed Paul complained that he was *sold under sin* (Rom. vii. 14), as a poor captive against his will; but Ahab was voluntary: he *sold himself to sin*; of choice, and as his own act and deed, he submitted to the dominion of sin. It was no excuse of his crimes that *Jezebel his wife stirred him up* to do wickedly, and made him, in many respects, worse than otherwise he would have been. To what a pitch of impiety did he arrive who had such tinder of corruption in his heart and such a temper in his bosom to strike fire into it! In many things he did ill, but he did *most abominably in following idols*, like the Canaanites; his immoralities were very provoking to God, but his idolatries were especially so. Israel's case was sad when a prince of such a character as this reigned over them.

II. The message with which Elijah was sent to him, when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, v. 17—19.

1. Hitherto God kept silence, did not intercept Jezebel's letters, nor stay the process of the elders of Jezreel; but now Ahab is reproved and his *sin set in order before his eyes*. (1.) The person sent is Elijah. A prophet of lower rank was sent with messages of kindness to him, ch. xx. 13. But the father of the prophets is sent to try him, and condemn him, for his murder. (2.) The place is Naboth's vineyard and the time just when he is taking possession of it; then, and there, must his doom be read him. By taking possession, he avowed all that was done, and made himself guilty *ex post facto*—*as an accessory after the fact*. There he was taken in the commission of the errors, and therefore the conviction would come upon him with so much the more force. "What

hast thou to do in this vineyard? What good canst thou expect from it when it is *purchased with blood* (Hab. ii. 12) and thou hast *caused the owner thereof to lose his life?*" Job xxxi. 39. Now that he is pleasing himself with his ill-gotten wealth, and giving direction for the turning of this vineyard into a flower-garden, his *meat in his bowels is turned. He shall not feel quietness. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him*, Job xx. 14, 20, 23.

2. Let us see what passed between him and the prophet.

(1.) Ahab vented his wrath against Elijah, fell into a passion at the sight of him, and, instead of humbling himself before the prophet, as he ought to have done (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12), was ready to fly in his face. *Hast thou found me, O my enemy?* v. 20. This shows, [1.] That he hated him. The last time we found them together they parted very good friends, *ch. xviii. 46.* Then Ahab had countenanced the reformation, and therefore then all was well between him and the prophet; but now he had relapsed, and was worse than ever. His conscience told him he had made God his enemy, and therefore he could not expect Elijah should be his friend. Note, That man's condition is very miserable that has made the word of God his enemy, and his condition is very desperate that reckons the ministers of that word his enemies because they *tell him the truth*, Gal. iv. 16. Ahab, having sold himself to sin, was resolved to stand to his bargain, and could not endure him that would have helped him to recover himself, [2.] That he feared him: *Hast thou found me?* intimating that he shunned him all he could, and it was now a terror to him to see him. The sight of him was like that of the handwriting upon the wall to Belshazzar; it made his countenance change, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. Never was poor debtor or criminal so confounded at the sight of the officer that came to arrest him. Men may thank themselves if they make God and his word a terror to them.

(2.) Elijah denounced God's wrath against Ahab: *I have found thee* (says he, v. 20), *because thou hast sold thyself to work evil.* Note, Those that give up themselves to sin will certainly be found out, sooner or later, to their unspeakable horror and amazement. Ahab is now set to the bar, as Naboth was, and trembles more than he did. [t.] Elijah finds the indictment against him, and convicts him upon the notorious evidence of the fact (v. 19): *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?* He was thus charged with the murder of Naboth, and it would not serve him to say the law killed him (perverted justice is the highest injustice), nor that, if he was unjustly prosecuted, it was not his doing—he knew nothing of it; for it was to please him that it was done, and he had shown

himself pleased with it, and so had made himself guilty of all that was done in the unjust prosecution of Naboth. He killed, for he took possession. If he takes the garden, he takes the guilt with it. *Terra transit cum onere—The land with the incumbrance.* [2.] He passes judgment upon him. He told him from God that his family should be ruined and rooted out (v. 21) and all his posterity cut off,—that his house should be made like the houses of his wicked predecessors, Jeroboam and Baasha (v. 22), particularly that those who died in the city should be meat for dogs and those who died in the field meat for birds (v. 24), which had been foretold of Jeroboam's house (*ch. xiv. 11*), and of Baasha's (*ch. xvi. 4*),—that Jezebel, particularly, should be devoured by dogs (v. 23), which was fulfilled (2 Kings ix. 36),—and, as for Ahab himself, that the dogs should *lick his blood* in the very same place where they licked Naboth's (v. 19)—*"Thy blood, even thine*, though it be royal blood, though it swell thy veins with pride and boil in thy heart with anger, shall ere long be an entertainment for the dogs", which was fulfilled, *ch. xxii. 33.* This intimates that he should die a violent death, should come to his grave with blood, and that disgrace should attend him, the foresight of which must needs be a great mortification to such a proud man. Punishments after death are here most insisted on, which, though such as affected the body only, were perhaps designed as figures of the soul's misery after death.

III. Ahab's humiliation under the sentence passed upon him, and the favourable message sent him thereupon. 1. Ahab was a kind of penitent. The message Elijah delivered to him in God's name put him into a fright for the present, so that he *rent his clothes and put on sackcloth*, v. 27. He was still a proud hardened sinner, and yet thus reduced. Note, God can make the stoutest heart to tremble and the proudest to humble itself. His word is quick and powerful, and is, when he pleases to make it so, like a *fire and a hammer*, Jer. xxiii. 29. It made Felix tremble. Ahab put on the garb and guise of a penitent, and yet his heart was unhumiliated and unchanged. After this, we find, he hated a faithful prophet, *ch. xxii. 8.* Note, It is no new thing to find the show and profession of repentance where yet the truth and substance of it are wanting. Ahab's repentance was only what might be seen of men: *Seest thou* (says God to Elijah) *how Ahab humbles himself*; it was external only, the garments rent, but not the heart. A hypocrite may go very far in the outward performance of holy duties and yet come short. 2. He obtained hereby a reprieve, which I may call a kind of pardon. Though it was but an outside repentance (lamenting the judgment only, and not the sin), though he did not leave his idols, nor restore the vineyard to Naboth's heirs, yet, because he did

hereby give some glory to God, God took notice of it, and bade Elijah take notice of it: *Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself? v. 29.* In consideration of this the threatened ruin of his house, which had not been fixed to any time, should be *adjourned to his son's days.* The sentence should not be revoked, but the execution suspended. Now, (1.) This discovers the great goodness of God, and his readiness to show mercy, which here *rejoices against judgment.* Favour was shown to this wicked man that God might magnify his goodness (says bishop Sanderson) even to the hazard of his other divine perfections; as if (says he) God would be thought unholy, or untrue, or unjust (though he be none of these), or any thing, rather than unmerciful. (2.) This teaches us to take notice of that which is good even in those who are not so good as they should be: let it be commended as far as it goes. (3.) This gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long; God is rewarding their external services with external mercies. (4.) This encourages all those that truly repent and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel. If a pretending partial penitent shall go to his house reprieved, doubtless a sincere penitent shall go to his house justified.

## CHAP. XXII.

This chapter finishes the history of Ahab's reign. It was promised in the close of the foregoing chapter that the ruin of his house should not come in his days, but his days were soon at an end. His war with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead is that which we have an account of in this chapter. 1. His preparations for that war. He consulted, 1. His privy-council, ver. 1.—3. 2. Jehoshaphat, ver. 4. 3. His prophets. (1.) His own, who encouraged him to go on this expedition (ver. 5, 6), Zedekiah particularly, ver. 11, 12. (2.) A prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, who was desired to come by Jehoshaphat (ver. 7, 8), sent for (ver. 9, 10—13, 14), upbraided Ahab with his confidence in the false prophets (ver. 15), but foretold his fall in this expedition (ver. 16—18), and gave him an account how he came to be thus imposed upon by his prophets, ver. 19—23. He is abused by Zedekiah (ver. 24, 25), and imprisoned by Ahab, ver. 26—28. II. The battle itself, in which, 1. Jehoshaphat is exposed. But, 2. Ahab is slain, ver. 29—40. In the close of the chapter we have a short account, (1.) Of the good reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, ver. 41—50. (2.) Of the wicked reign of Ahaziah king of Israel, ver. 51—53.

**A**ND they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. 2 And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3 And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is our's, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? 4 And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. 5 And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hun-

dred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 7 And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? 8 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 9 Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. 10 And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. 12 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand. 13 And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. 14 And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

Though Ahab continued under guilt and wrath, and the dominion of the lusts to which he had sold himself, yet, as a reward for his professions of repentance and humiliation, though the time drew near when he should descend into battle and perish, yet we have him blessed with a three years' peace (v. 1) and an honourable visit made him by Jehoshaphat king of Judah, v. 2. The Jews have a fabulous conceit, that when Ahab humbled himself for his sin, and lay in sackcloth, he sent for Jehoshaphat to come to him, to chastise him; and that he staid with him for some time, and gave him so many stripes every day. This is a groundless tradition. He came now, it is probable, to con-

sult him about the affairs of their kingdoms. It is strange that so great a man as Jehoshaphat would pay so much respect to a kingdom revolted from the house of David, and that so good a man should show so much kindness to a king revolted from the worship of God. But, though he was a godly man, his temper was too easy, which betrayed him into snares and inconveniences. The Syrians durst not give Ahab any disturbance. But,

I. Ahab here meditates a war against the Syrians, and advises concerning it with those about him, *v. 3*. The king of Syria gave him the provocation; when he lay at his mercy, he promised to restore him his cities (*ch. xx. 34*), and Ahab foolishly took his word, when he ought not to have dismissed him till the cities were put into his possession. But now he knows by experience, what he ought before to have considered, that as the kisses, so the promises, *of an enemy are deceitful*, and there is no confidence to be put in leagues extorted by distress. Benhadad is one of those princes that think themselves bound by their word no further and no longer than it is for their interest. Whether any other cities were restored we do not find, but Ramoth-Gilead was not, a considerable city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan, a Levites' city, and one of the cities of refuge. Ahab blames himself, and his people, that they did not bestir themselves to recover it out of the hands of the Syrians, and to chastise Benhadad's violation of his league; and resolves to let that ungrateful perfidious prince know that as he had given him peace he could give him trouble. Ahab has a good cause, yet succeeds not. Equity is not to be judged of by prosperity.

II. He engages Jehoshaphat, and draws him in, to join with him in this expedition, for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, *v. 4*. And here I do not wonder that Ahab should desire the assistance of so pious and prosperous a neighbour. Even bad men have often coveted the friendship of the good. It is desirable to have an interest in those that have an interest in heaven, and to have those with us that have God with them. But it is strange that Jehoshaphat will go so entirely into Ahab's interests as to say, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people*. I hope not; Jehoshaphat and his people are not so wicked and corrupt as Ahab and his people. Too great a complaisance to evil-doers has brought many good people, through unwariness, into a dangerous fellowship with the *unfruitful works of darkness*. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dearly for his compliment when, in battle, he was taken for Ahab. Yet some observe that in joining with Israel against Syria he atoned for his father's fault in joining with Syria against Israel, *ch. xv. 19, 20*.

III. At the special instance and request of

Jehoshaphat, he asks counsel of the prophets concerning this expedition. Ahab thought it enough to consult with his statesmen, but Jehoshaphat moves that they should enquire *of the word of the Lord, v. 5*. Note, 1. Whithersoever a good man goes he desires to take God along with him, and will acknowledge him in all his ways, ask leave of him, and look up to him for success. 2. Whithersoever a good man goes he ought to take his religion along with him, and not be ashamed to own it, no, not when he is with those who have no kindness for it. Jehoshaphat has not left behind him, at Jerusalem, his affection, his veneration, for *the word of the Lord*, but both avows it and endeavours to introduce it into Ahab's court. If Ahab drew him into his wars, he will draw Ahab into his devotions.

IV. Ahab's 400 prophets, the standing regiment he had of them (*prophets of the groves* they called them), agreed to encourage him in this expedition and to assure him of success, *v. 6*. He put the question to them with a seeming fairness: *Shall I go or shall I forbear?* But they knew which way his inclination was and designed only to humour the two kings. To please Jehoshaphat, they made use of the name *Jehovah*: He shall deliver it into the hand of the king; they stole the word from the true prophets (*Jer. xxiii. 30*) and spoke their language. To please Ahab they said, *Go up*. They had indeed probabilities on their side: Ahab had, not long since, beaten the Syrians twice; he had now a good cause, and was much strengthened by his alliance with Jehoshaphat. But they pretended to speak by prophecy, not by rational conjecture, by divine, not human, foresight: "Thou shalt certainly recover Ramoth-Gilead." Zedekiah, a leading man among these prophets, in imitation of the true prophets, illustrated his false prophecy with a sign, *v. 11*. He made himself a pair of iron horns, representing the two kings, and their honour and power (both of which were signified by horns, exaltation and force), and with these the Syrians must be pushed. All the prophets agreed, as one man, that Ahab should return from this expedition a conqueror, *v. 12*. Unity is not always the mark of a true church and a true ministry. Here were 400 men that prophesied with one mind and one mouth, and yet all in an error.

V. Jehoshaphat cannot relish this sort of preaching; it is not like what he was used to. The false prophets cannot so mimic the true but that he who had spiritual senses exercised could discern the fallacy, and therefore he enquired for a *prophet of the Lord besides, v. 7*. He is too much of a courtier to say any thing by way of reflection on the king's chaplains, but he waits to see a *prophet of the Lord*, intimating that he could not look upon these to be so. They seemed to be somewhat (whatever they were, it made

no matter to him), but, in conference, they added nothing to him, they gave him no satisfaction, Gal. ii. 6. One faithful prophet of the Lord was worth them all.

VI. Ahab has another, but one he hates, Micaiah by name, and, to please Jehoshaphat, he is willing to have him sent for, v. 8—10. Ahab owned they might enquire of the Lord by him, that he was a true prophet, and one that knew God's mind. And yet, 1. He hated him, and was not ashamed to own to the king of Judah that he did so, and to give this for a reason, He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And whose fault was that? If Ahab had done well, he would have heard nothing but good from heaven; if he do ill, he may thank himself for all the uneasiness which the reproofs and threats of God's word gave him. Note, Those are wretchedly hardened in sin, and are ripening apace for ruin, who hate God's ministers because they deal plainly with them and faithfully warn them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and reckon those their enemies that tell them the truth. 2. He had (it should seem) imprisoned him; for, when he committed him (v. 26), he bade the officer carry him back, namely, to the place whence he came. We may suppose that this was he that reproved him for his clemency to Ben-hadad (ch. xx. 38, &c.) and for so doing was cast into prison, where he had lain these three years. This was the reason why Ahab knew where to find him so readily, v. 9. But his imprisonment had not excluded him from divine visits: the spirit of prophecy continued with him there. He was bound, but the word of the Lord was not. Nor did it in the least abate his courage, nor make him less confident or faithful in delivering his message. Jehoshaphat gave too gentle a reproof to Ahab for expressing his indignation against a faithful prophet: Let not the king say so, v. 8. He should have said, "Thou art unjust to the prophet, unkind to thyself, and puttest an affront upon his Lord and thine, in saying so." Such sinners as Ahab must be rebuked sharply. However he so far yielded to the reproof that, for fear of provoking Jehoshaphat to break off from his alliance with him, he orders Micaiah to be sent for with all speed, v. 9. The two kings sat each in their robes and chairs of state, in the gate of Samaria, ready to receive this poor prophet, and to hear what he had to say; for many will give God's word the hearing that will not lend it an obedient ear. They were attended with a crowd of flattering prophets, that could not think of prophesying any thing but what was very sweet and very smooth to two such glorious princes now in confederacy. Those that love to be flattered shall not want flatterers.

VII. Micaiah is pressed by the officer that fetches him to follow the cry, v. 13. That officer was unworthy the name of an Israelite

who pretended to prescribe to a prophet; but he thought him altogether such a one as the rest, who studied to please men and not God. He told Micaiah how unanimous the other prophets were in foretelling the king's good success, how agreeable it was to the king, intimating that it was his interest to say as they said—he might thereby gain, not only enlargement, but preferment. Those that dote upon worldly things themselves think every body else should do so too, and true or false, right or wrong, speak and act for their secular interest only. He intimated likewise that it would be to no purpose to contradict such a numerous and unanimous vote; he would be ridiculed, as affecting a foolish singularity, if he should. But Micaiah, who knows better things, protests, and backs his protestation with an oath, that he will deliver his message from God with all faithfulness, whether it be pleasing or displeasing to his prince (v. 14): "What the Lord saith to me, that will I speak, without addition, diminution, or alteration." This was nobly resolved, and as became one who had his eye to a greater King than either of these, arrayed with brighter robes, and sitting on a higher throne.

15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD? 17 And he said, I saw all Israeli scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. 18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? 19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. 20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade

him. 22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. 24 But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? 25 And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. 26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; 27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. 28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

Here Micaiah does well, but, as is common, suffers ill for so doing.

I. We are told how faithfully he delivered his message, as one that was more solicitous to please God than to humour either the great or the many. In three ways he delivers his message, and all displeasing to Ahab:—

1. He spoke as the rest of the prophets had spoken, but ironically: *Go, and prosper*, v. 15. Ahab put the same question to him that he had put to his own prophets (*Shall we go, or shall we forbear?*) seeming desirous to know God's mind, when, like Balaam, he was strongly bent to do his own, which Micaiah plainly took notice of when he bade him go, but with such an air and pronunciation as plainly showed he spoke it by way of derision; as if he had said, "I know you are determined to go, and I hear your own prophets are unanimous in assuring you of success; go then, and take what follows. They say, *The Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king*; but I do not tell thee that *thus saith the Lord*; no, he saith otherwise." Note, Those deserve to be bantered that love to be flattered; and it is just with God to give up those to their own counsels that give up themselves to their own lusts, Eccl. xi. 9. In answer to this Ahab adjured him to

tell him the truth, and not to jest with him (v. 16), as if he sincerely desired to know both what God would have him to do and what he would do with him, yet intending to represent the prophet as a perverse ill-humoured man, that would not tell him the truth till he was thus put to his oath, or adjured to do it.

2. Being thus pressed, he plainly foretold that the king would be cut off in this expedition, and his army scattered, v. 17. He saw them in a vision, or in a dream, dispersed upon the mountains, as sheep that had no one to guide them. *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, Zech. xiii. 7. This intimates, (1.) That Israel should be deprived of their king, who was their shepherd. God took notice of it, *These have no master*. (2.) That they would be obliged to retire *re infecta*—without accomplishing their object. He does not foresee any great slaughter in the army, but that they should make a dishonourable retreat. *Let them return every man to his house in peace*, put into disorder indeed for the present, but no great losers by the death of their king; he shall fall in war, but they shall go home in peace. Thus Micaiah, in his prophecy, testified what he had seen and heard (let them take it how they pleased), while the others prophesied merely out of their own hearts; see Jer. xxiii. 28. "The prophet that has a dream let him tell that, and so quote his authority; and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully, and not his own; for what is the chaff to the wheat?" Now Ahab finds himself aggrieved, turns to Jehoshaphat, and appeals to him whether Micaiah had not manifestly a spite against him, v. 18. Those that bear malice to others are generally willing to believe that others bear malice to them, though they have no cause for it, and therefore to put the worst constructions upon all they say. What evil did Micaiah prophesy to Ahab in telling him that, if he proceeded in this expedition, it would be fatal to him, while he might choose whether he would proceed in it or no? The greatest kindness we can do to one that is going in a dangerous way is to tell him of his danger.

3. He informed the king how it was that all his prophets encouraged him to proceed, that God permitted Satan by them to deceive him into his ruin, and he by vision knew of it; it was represented to him, and he represented it to Ahab, that the God of heaven had determined he should fall at Ramoth-Gilead (v. 19, 20), that the favour he had wickedly shown to Ben-hadad might be punished by him and his Syrians, and that he being in some doubt whether he should go to Ramoth-Gilead or no, and resolving to be advised by his prophets, they should persuade him to it and prevail (v. 21, 22); and hence it was that they encouraged him with so much assurance (v. 23); it was a lie from the father of lies, but by divine permission.



This matter is here represented after the manner of men. We are not to imagine that God is ever put upon new counsels, or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes, nor that he needs to consult with angels, or any creature, about the methods he should take, nor that he is the author of sin or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie; but, besides what was intended by this with reference to Ahab himself, it is to teach us, (1.) That God is a great king above all kings, and has a throne above all the thrones of earthly princes. "You have your thrones," said Micaiah to these two kings, "and you think you may do what you will, and we must all say as you would have us; but *I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne*, and every man's judgment proceeding from him, and therefore I must say as he says; he is not a man, as you are." (2.) That he is continually attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, whose heavenly hosts, who stand by him, ready to go where he sends them and to do what he bids them, messengers of mercy on his right hand, of wrath on his left hand. (3.) That he not only takes cognizance of, but presides over, all the affairs of this lower world, and overrules them according to the counsel of his own will. The rise and fall of princes, the issues of war, and all the great affairs of state, which are the subject of the consultations of wise and great men, are no more above God's direction than the meanest concerns of the poorest cottages are below his notice. (4.) That God has many ways of bringing about his own counsels, particularly concerning the fall of sinners when they are ripe for ruin; he can do it either in this manner or in that manner. (5.) That there are malicious and lying spirits which go about continually seeking to devour, and, in order to that, seeking to deceive, and especially to put lies into the mouths of prophets, by them to entice many to their destruction. (6.) It is not without the divine permission that the devil deceives men, and even thereby God serves his own purposes. *With him are strength and wisdom, the deceived and the deceiver are his*, Job xii. 16. When he pleases, for the punishment of those who receive not the truth in the love of it, he not only lets Satan loose to deceive them (Rev. xx. 7, 8), but gives men up to strong delusions to believe him, 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. (7.) Those are manifestly marked for ruin that are thus given up. God has certainly spoken evil concerning those whom he has given up to be imposed upon by lying prophets. Thus Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning, not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but of the danger of believing those that encouraged him to proceed. Thus we are warned to beware of false prophets, and to try the spirits; the lying spirit never deceives so fatally as in the mouth of prophets.

II. We are told how he was abused for

delivering his message thus faithfully, thus plainly, in a way so very proper both to convince and to affect. 1. Zedekiah, a wicked prophet, impudently insulted him in the face of the court, *smote him on the cheek*, to reproach him, to silence him and stop his mouth, and to express his indignation at him (thus was our blessed Saviour abused, Matt. xxvi. 67, that Judge of Israel, Mic. v. 1); and as if he not only had the spirit of the Lord, but the monopoly of this Spirit, that he might not go without his leave, he asks, *Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak to thee?* v. 24. The false prophets were always the worst enemies the true prophets had, and not only stirred up the government against them, but were themselves abusive to them, as Zedekiah here. To strike within the verge of the court, especially in the king's presence, is looked upon by our law as a high misdemeanour; yet this wicked prophet gives this abuse to a prophet of the Lord, and is not reprimanded nor bound to his good behaviour for it. Ahab was pleased with it, and Jehoshaphat had not courage to appear for the injured prophet, pretending it was out of his jurisdiction; but Micaiah, though he returns not his blow (God's prophets are no strikers nor persecutors, dare not avenge themselves, render blow for blow, or be in any way accessory to the breach of the peace), yet, since he boasted so much of the Spirit, as those commonly do that know least of his operations, he leaves him to be convinced of his error by the event: *Thou shalt know when thou hidest thyself in an inner chamber*, v. 25. It is likely Zedekiah went with Ahab to the battle, and took his horns of iron with him to encourage the soldiers, to see with pleasure the accomplishment of his prophecy, and return in triumph with the king; but, the army being routed, he fled among the rest from the sword of the enemy, sheltered himself as Ben-hadad had done in a chamber within a chamber (ch. xx. 30), lest he should perish, as he knew he deserved to do, with those whom he had deluded, as Balaam did (Num. xxxi. 8), and lest the blind prophet should fall into the ditch with the blinded prince whom he had misled. Note, Those that will not have their mistakes rectified in time by the word of God will be undeceived, when it is too late, by the judgments of God. 2. Ahab, that wicked king, committed him to prison (v. 27), not only ordered him to be taken into custody, or remitted to the prison whence he came, but to be fed with bread and water, coarse bread and puddle-water, till he should return, not doubting but that he should return a conqueror, and then he would put him to death for a false prophet (v. 27)—hard usage for one that would have prevented his ruin! But by this it appeared that God had determined to destroy him, as 2 Chron. xxv. 16. How confident is Ahab of success.

He doubts not but he shall return in peace, forgetting what he himself had reminded Ben-hadad of, *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast*; but there was little likelihood of his coming home in peace when he left one of God's prophets behind him in prison. Micaiah put it upon the issue, and called all the people to be witnesses that he did so: "*If thou return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me, v. 28.* Let me incur the reproach and punishment of a false prophet, if the king come home alive." He ran no hazard by this appeal, for he knew whom he had believed; he that is terrible to the kings of the earth, and treads upon princes as mortar, will rather let thousands of them fall to the ground than one jot or tittle of his own word; he will not fail to confirm the word of his servants, Isa. xlv. 26.

29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle. 31 But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. 32 And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 34 And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. 35 And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. 36 And there went a proclamation throughout the host about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country. 37 So the king died, and was brought to

Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. 38 And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake. 39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 40 So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

The matter in contest between God's prophet and Ahab's prophets is here soon determined, and it is made to appear which was in the right. Here,

1. The two kings march with their forces to Ramoth-Gilead, v. 29. That the king of Israel, who hated God's prophet, should so far disbelieve his admonition as to persist in his resolution, notwithstanding, is not strange; but that Jehoshaphat, that pious prince, who had desired to enquire by a *prophet of the Lord*, as disrelishing and discrediting Ahab's prophets, should yet proceed, after so fair a warning, is matter of astonishment. But by the easiness of his temper he was carried away with the delusion (as Barnabas was with the dissimulation, Gal. ii. 13) of his friends. He gave too much heed to Ahab's prophets, because they pretended to speak from God too, and in his country he had never been imposed upon by such cheats. He was ready to give his opinion with the majority, and to conclude that it was 400 to one but they should succeed. Micaiah had not forbidden them to go; nay, at first, he said, *Go, and prosper*. If it came to the worst, it was only Ahab's fall that was foretold, and therefore Jehoshaphat hoped he might safely venture.

11. Ahab adopts a contrivance by which he hopes to secure himself and expose his friend (v. 30): "*I will disguise myself, and go in the habit of a common soldier, but let Jehoshaphat put on his robes, to appear in the dress of a general.*" He pretended thereby to do honour to Jehoshaphat, and to compliment him with the sole command of the army in this action. He shall direct and give orders, and Ahab will serve as a soldier under him. But he intended, 1. To make a liar of a good prophet. Thus he hoped to elude the danger, and so to defeat the threatening, as if, by disguising himself, he could escape the divine cognizance and the judgments that pursued him. 2. To make a fool of a good king, whom he did not cordially love, because he was one that adhered to God and so condemned his apostasy. He knew that if any perished it must be the shepherd

(so Micaiah had foretold); and perhaps he had intimation of the charge the enemy had to fight chiefly *against the king of Israel*, and therefore basely intended to betray Jehoshaphat to the danger, that he might secure himself. Ahab was marked for ruin; one would not have been in his coat for a great sum; yet he will over-persuade this godly king to muster for him. See what those get that join in affinity with vicious men, whose consciences are debauched, and who are lost to every thing that is honourable. How can it be expected that he should be true to his friend that has been false to his God?

III. Jehoshaphat, having more piety than policy, put himself into the post of honour, though it was the post of danger, and was thereby brought into peril of his life, but God graciously delivered him. The king of Syria charged his captains to level their force, not against the king of Judah, for with him he had no quarrel, but against the king of Israel only (v. 31), to aim at his person, as if against him he had a particular enmity. Now Ahab was justly repaid for sparing Ben-hadad, who, as the seed of the serpent commonly do, stung the bosome in which he was fostered and saved from perishing. Some think that he designed only to have him taken prisoner, that he might now give him as honourable a treatment as he had formerly received from him. Whatever was the reason, this charge the officers received, and endeavoured to oblige their prince in this matter; for, seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal habit, they took him for the king of Israel, and surrounded him. Now, 1. By his danger God let him know that he was displeased with him for joining in confederacy with Ahab. Jehoshaphat had said, in compliment to Ahab (v. 4), *I am as thou art*; and now he was indeed taken for him. Those that associate with evil doers are in danger of sharing in their plagues. 2. By his deliverance God let him know that, though he was displeased with him, yet he had not deserted him. Some of the captains that knew him perceived their mistake, and so retired from the pursuit of him; but it is said (2 Chron. xviii. 31) that *God moved them* (for he has all hearts in his hand) *to depart from him*. To him he cried out, not in cowardice, but devotion, and from him his relief came: Ahab was in no care to succour him. God is a friend that will not fail us when other friends do.

IV. Ahab receives his mortal wound in the battle, notwithstanding his endeavours to secure himself in the habit of a private sentinel. Let no man think to hide himself from God's judgment, no, not in masquerade. *Thy hand shall find out all thy enemies, whatever disguise they are in*, v. 34. The Syrian that shot him little thought of doing such a piece of service to God and his king; for he *drew a bow at a venture*, not aiming particularly at any man, yet God so

directed the arrow that, 1. He hit the right person, the man that was marked for destruction, whom, if they had taken alive, as was designed, perhaps Ben-hadad would have spared. Those cannot escape with life whom God hath doomed to death. 2. He hit him in the right place, *between the joints of the harness*, the only place about him where this arrow of death could find entrance. No armour is of proof against the darts of divine vengeance. Case the criminal in steel, and it is all one, *he that made him can make his sword to approach him*. That which to us seems altogether casual is done by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.

V. The army is dispersed by the enemy and sent home by the king. Either Jehoshaphat or Ahab ordered the retreat of the sheep, when the shepherd was smitten: *Every man to his city*, for it is to no purpose to attempt any thing more, v. 36. Ahab himself lived long enough to see that part of Micaiah's prophecy accomplished that all Israel should be scattered *upon the mountains of Gilead* (v. 17), and perhaps with his dying lips did himself give orders for it; for though he would be carried out of the army, to have his wounds dressed (v. 34), yet he would be *held up in his chariot*, to see if his army were victorious. But, when he saw the battle increase against them, his spirits sunk, and he died, but his death was so lingering that he had time to feel himself die; and we may well imagine with what horror he now reflected upon the wickedness he had committed, the warnings he had slighted, Baal's altars, Naboth's vineyard, Micaiah's imprisonment. Now he sees himself flattered into his own ruin, and Zedekiah's horns of iron pushing, not the Syrians, but himself, into destruction. Thus is he *brought to the king of terrors without hope in his death*.

VI. The royal corpse is brought to Samaria and buried there (v. 37), and hither are brought the bloody chariot and bloody armour in which he died, v. 38. One particular circumstance is taken notice of, because there was in it the accomplishment of a prophecy, that when they brought the chariot to the pool of Samaria, to be washed, the dogs (and swine, says the LXX.) gathered about it, and, as is usual, *licked the blood*, or, as some think, the water in which it was washed, with which the blood was mingled: the dogs made no difference between royal blood and other blood. Now Naboth's blood was avenged (ch. xxi. 19), and that word of David, as well as Elijah's word, was fulfilled (Ps. lxxviii. 23), *That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thy enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same*. The dogs licking the guilty blood was perhaps designed to represent the terrors that prey upon the guilty soul after death.

Lastly, The story of Ahab is here concluded in the usual form, v. 39, 40

his works mention is made of an ivory house which he built, so called because many parts of it were inlaid with ivory; perhaps it was intended to vie with the stately palace of the kings of Judah, which Solomon built.

41 And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42 Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43 And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing *that which was right* in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. 44 And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. 45 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he showed, and how he warred, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 46 And the remnant of the Sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land. 47 *There was* then no king in Edom: a deputy was king. 48 Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. 49 Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not. 50 And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 51 Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. 52 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: 53 For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Is-

rael, according to all that his father had done.

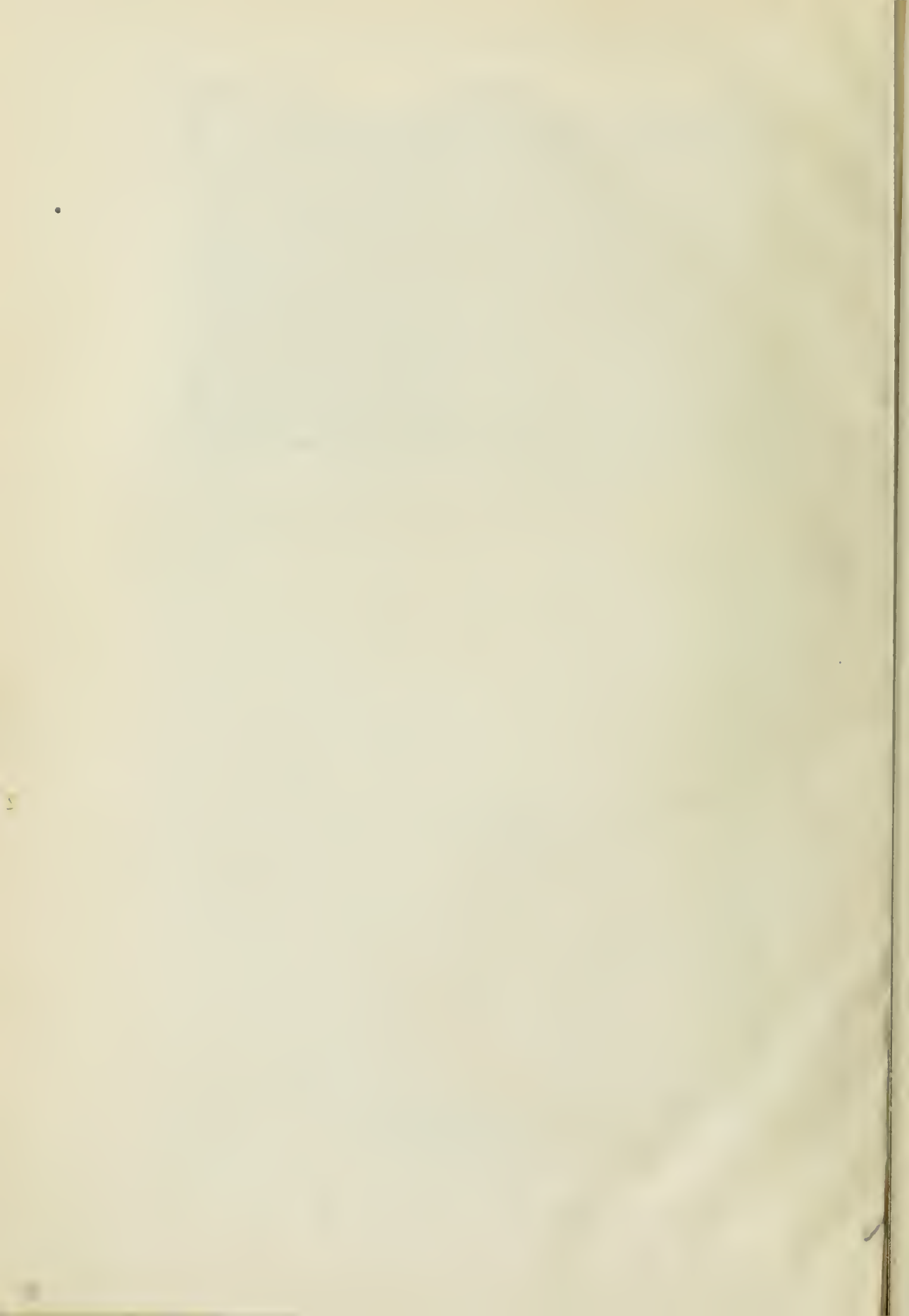
Here is, I. A short account of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, of which we shall have a much fuller narrative in the book of Chronicles, and of the greatness and goodness of that prince, neither of which was lessened or sullied by any thing but his intimacy with the house of Ahab, which, upon several accounts, was a diminution to him. His confederacy with Ahab in war we have already found dangerous to him, and his confederacy with Ahaziah his son in trade sped no better. He offered to go partner with him in a fleet of merchant-ships, that should fetch gold from Ophir, as Solomon's navy did, *v.* 49. See 2 Chron. xx. 35, 36. But, while they were preparing to set sail, they were exceedingly damaged and disabled by a storm (*broken at Ezion-geber*), which a prophet gave Jehoshaphat to understand was a rebuke to him for his league with wicked Ahaziah (2 Chron. xx. 37); and therefore, as we are told here (*v.* 49), when Ahaziah desired a second time to be a partner with him, or, if that could not be obtained, that he might but send his servants with some effects on board Jehoshaphat's ships, he refused: *Jehoshaphat would not*. The rod of God, expounded by the word of God, had effectually broken him off from his confederacy with that ungodly unhappy prince. Better buy wisdom dear than be without it; but experience is therefore said to be the mistress of fools because those are fools that will not learn till they are taught by experience, and particularly till they are taught the danger of associating with wicked people. Now Jehoshaphat's reign appears here to have been none of the longest, but one of the best. 1. It was none of the longest, for he reigned but twenty-five years (*v.* 42), but then it was in the prime of his time, between thirty-five and sixty, and these twenty-five, added to his father's happy forty-one, give us a grateful idea of the flourishing condition of the kingdom of Judah, and of religion in it, for a great while, even when things were very bad, upon all accounts, in the kingdom of Israel. If Jehoshaphat reigned not so long as his father, to balance this he had not those blemishes on the latter end of his reign that his father had (2 Chron. xvi. 9, 10, 12), and it is better for a man that has been in reputation for wisdom and honour to die in the midst of it than to outlive it. 2. Yet it was one of the best, both in respect of piety and prosperity. (1.) He did well: He *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord* (*v.* 43), observed the commands of his God, and trod in the steps of his good father; and he persevered therein: He *turned not aside from it*. Yet every man's character has some *but* or other, so had his; the *high places were not taken away*, no, not out of Judah and Benjamin, though those

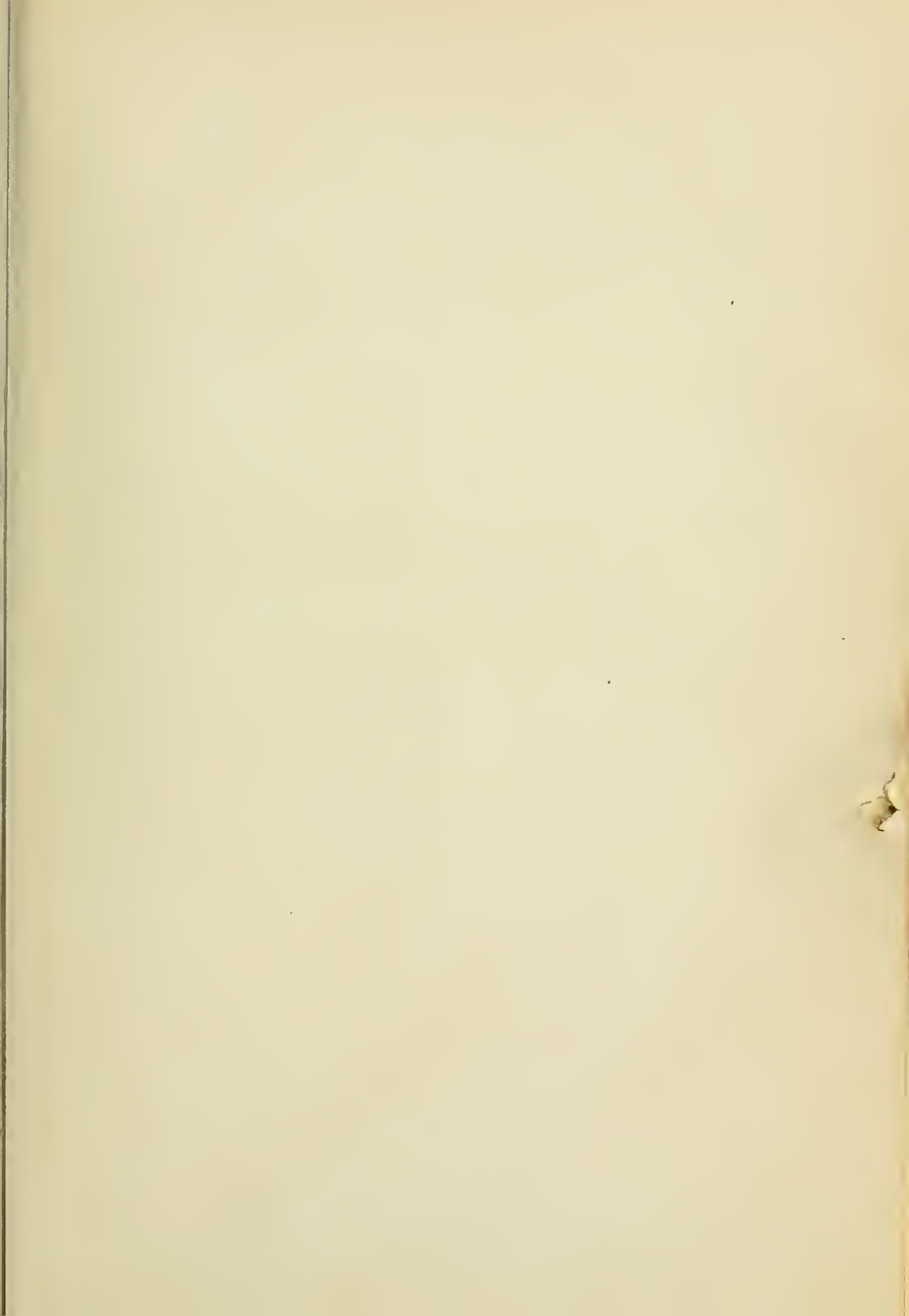
tribes lay so near Jerusalem that they might easily bring their offerings and incense to the altar there, and could not pretend, as some other of the tribes, the inconveniency of lying remote. But old corruptions are with difficulty rooted out, especially when they have formerly had the patronage of those that were good, as the high places had of Samuel, Solomon, and some others. (2.) His affairs did well. He prevented the mischiefs which had attended their wars with the kingdom of Israel, establishing a lasting peace (v. 44), which would have been a greater blessing if he had contented himself with a peace, and not carried it on to an affinity with Israel; he put a deputy, or viceroy, in Edom, so that that kingdom was tributary to him (v. 47), and therein the prophecy concerning Esau and Jacob was fulfilled, that *the elder should serve the younger*. And, in general, mention is made of his might and his wars, v. 45. He pleased God, and God blessed him with strength and success. His death is spoken of (v. 50), to shut up his

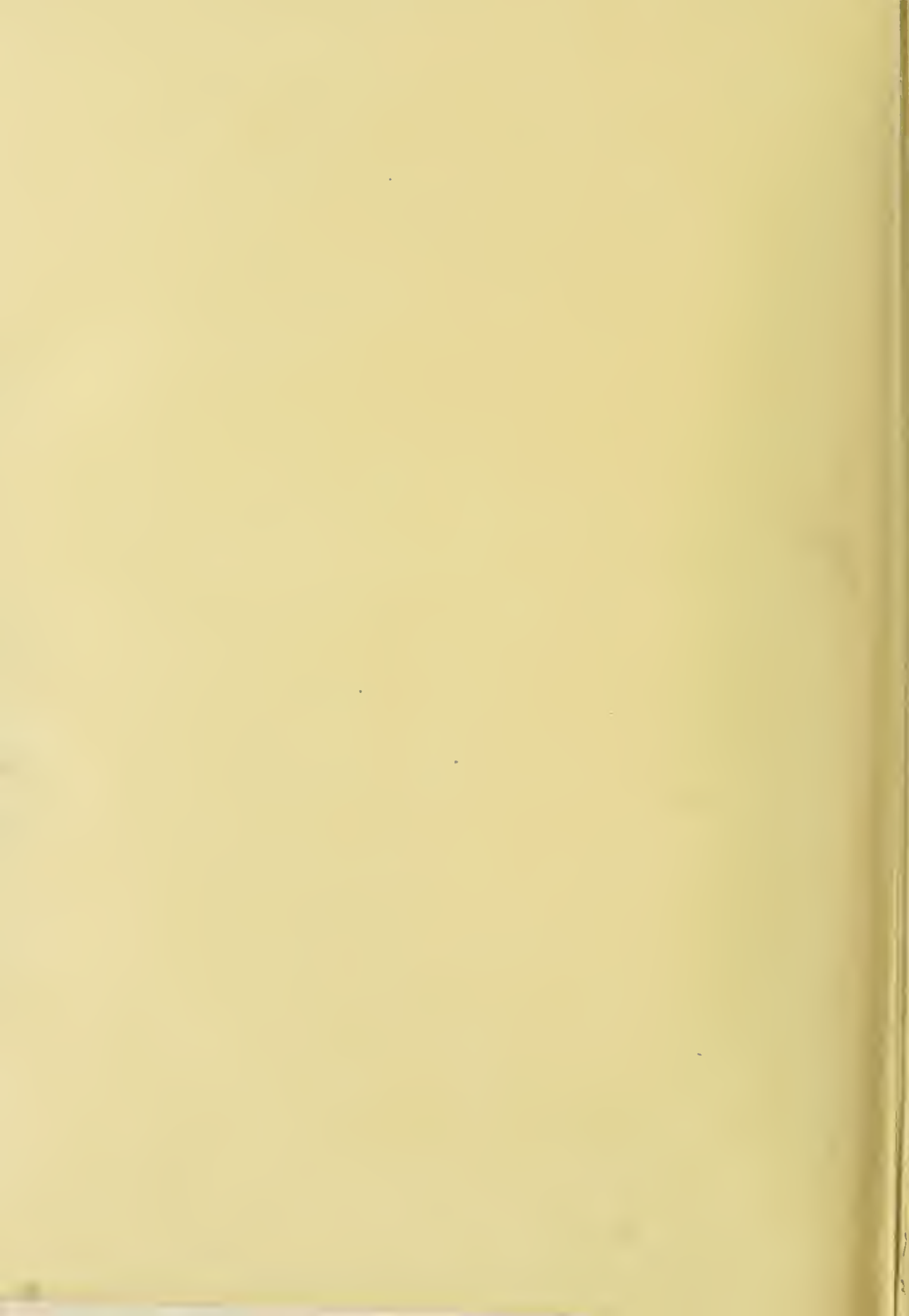
story, yet, in the history of the kings of Israel, we find mention of him afterwards, 2 Kings iii. 7.

II. The beginning of the story of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, v. 51—53. His reign was very short, not two years. Some sinners God makes quick work with. It is a very bad character that is here given him. He not only kept up Jeroboam's idolatry, but the worship of Baal likewise; though he had heard of the ruin of Jeroboam's family, and had seen his own father drawn into destruction by the prophets of Baal, who had often been proved false prophets, yet he received no instruction, took no warning, but followed the example of his wicked father and the counsel of his more wicked mother Jezebel, who was still living. Miserable are the children that not only derive a stock of corruption from their parents, but are thus taught by them to trade with it; and unhappy, most unhappy parents, are those that help to damn their children's souls.

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